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The fulfillment of Canadian student-athletes in the NCAA

By

Adam Ehsan Ali

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the Faculty of Human Kinetics

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Human Kinetics at the

University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2014

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The fulfillment of Canadian student-athletes in the NCAA

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February 10, 2014

**Declaration of Originality**

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, my thesis does not infringe upon anyone's copyright nor violate any proprietary rights and that any ideas, techniques, quotations, or any other material from the work of other people included in my thesis, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices. Furthermore, to the extent that I have included copyrighted material that surpasses the bounds of fair dealing within the meaning of the Canada Copyright Act, I certify that I have obtained a written permission from the copyright owner(s) to include such material(s) in my thesis and have included copies of such copyright clearances to my appendix.

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### **Abstract**

About 2,000 Canadian student-athletes move to the United States for university pursuits annually (Barnes as cited in Falls & Wilson, 2012). The purpose of this study was to garner a better understanding of this migration through analyzing the experiences of Canadian athletes in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Interviews with seven former NCAA graduating athletes and five NCAA athletes who returned to Canada without finishing their degree were analyzed utilizing Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. Results revealed that the practical consciousness of the participants in viewing the NCAA as the "gold-standard" of post-secondary sport was unchanged or strengthened following their experience. Participants were pro-active in dealing with dilemmas, including challenging their coaches, balancing other identities in their post-secondary lives, and re-locating to an environment that garnered more attractive resources. This framework provides intercollegiate scholars and university athletic departments with recommendations for improving the autonomy and diversity of university student-athletes.

### **Dedication**

This master's thesis is dedicated to my family for their unconditional love and support.

To my incredible parents Beth and Ehsan for their wisdom and guidance. You both have been pillars of leadership, patience and integrity throughout my life. This achievement is amongst the many that would not have been possible without your influence.

To my sister Sara whose maturity despite being nearly three years my junior continues to eclipse my own. Your words of encouragement and belief always help me persevere through the toughest of life's challenges.

And to my grandmother Joyce for spending many a hour helping me with my homework throughout my childhood and thus sparking my academic journey.

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## **Introduction**

Annually there are an average of 2,000 Canadian student-athletes between 17 and 23 years of age who move to the United States for their university education and athletic pursuits (Barnes, as cited in Falls & Wilson, 2012). This southern migration of Canada's youth athletes across the border to play in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has been met with concern on the part of Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), the governing body for intercollegiate athletics in Canada. In an interview conducted in December 2012, former CIS President Leo MacPherson commented that this process has resulted in a talent-drain in Canadian university athletics, which has been detrimental to the quality of play in the CIS (Hastie, 2013). The purpose of this study was to get a deeper understanding of this phenomenon by analyzing the experiences of Canadian student-athletes who move to the NCAA for their post-secondary life. Giddens' duality of structure theory was used to guide this process. My research documented how the practical consciousness and agency of student-athletes within the NCAA evolved over their time within the collegiate sport system and how fulfilled they were in relation to their initial expectations for moving south of the border. This study explored both the experiences of Canadian student-athletes who fulfilled their NCAA eligibility and those who returned to Canada without finishing their eligibility or degree in the United States (U.S.). In addition, the hybridity of these student-athletes was analyzed through not just their sport identity, but their academic and social roles as well, thus bringing a holistic perspective to this examination of experiences of Canadian NCAA athletes.

## **Context**

The migration of Canada's sporting youth to the United States has not been a recent phenomenon, as American university and college athletic directors have long been attempting to

attract top athletic participants from beyond its borders to join their teams (Dyck, 2011). At first glance, it might seem easy to understand why Canadian student-athletes would be motivated to pursue their athletic and academic careers in the NCAA. The cultural framing of "full-ride" scholarships for all types of sports offered by universities and colleges illustrates a "free-ride" with tuition, residences and meal plans taken care of for collegiate athletes. By contrast, CIS institutions offer Athletic Financial Awards (AFA's), which cover only tuition and compulsory fees. In addition, the exposure of the NCAA through lucrative television contracts for sports such as men's football and basketball makes accessing these particular sports especially attractive for some Canadian youth. The astounding spectator support and adoration for some intercollegiate sports in the NCAA dwarfs that of any CIS sporting event or team. The media sources in Canada consistently cover young athletes who are offered scholarships to American post-secondary institutions (Dyck, 2010). Athletes who received AFA's in CIS institutions do not enjoy near the accolades as their NCAA counterparts, and Dyck (2010) believed this to be because the Canadian construction of high achievement in sport, as well as in other areas, is tied to international comparisons. This leads to a culture where the focus by youth, teachers, coaches and parents is on the pursuit of an athletic scholarship offered by American institutions. In this context, a young Canadian athletic prospect who is possibly being considered for a U.S. scholarship would clearly be recognized as an accomplished sport participant. Many parents also shape their child-rearing around the "family project" of athletic excellence, constructing an environment where their children would identify the next logical step as pursuing a U.S. scholarship (Dyck, 2010). Kimiecic and Horn (2012) found that parenting style was significantly related to children's beliefs about physical activity, and thus the family influence can be a vital factor in a child's motivation to go to the U.S. Further, the success of producing a "scholarship"

athlete may be seen as justifiable for the ethically questionable ways in which parents may bring up their child around sport. The perception that NCAA scholarships provide an "invaluable opportunity" for a young Canadian athlete to play at the "gold standard" of intercollegiate athletics while obtaining a free degree from a notable American school is frequently communicated by coaches and parents alike (Dyck, 2010). Further, the "achievement" of going beyond perceived inferior Canadian standards for sports can also be a strong factor in the desire to go South on an athletic scholarship.

From a gendered perspective, Shogan (2007) argues that for boys sport is a place where they can test their masculinity. Whitson (as cited in Shogan, 2007) stated that demonstrating success amongst fellow males within the realm of athletics and sport is an important requirement for higher status amongst males. While this may point to the shaping of male athletes towards the push for scholarship accolades, such athletic status may also be desired by the many female athletes who have dedicated much of their lives to high-performance sport.

For parents of minority youth with low income levels, the allure of NCAA scholarships can also mean giving their child an education and a chance to gain financial aid and social security (James, 2005). James (2003) found that educators based in the Toronto area were shaped by the public perception that focuses on the athleticism of Black youth, and thus they felt responsible for supporting African-Canadian students in their bid for an athletic scholarship. This racialization process produced the narrative that the best way for black students to get an education is through their athleticism rather than their intellect (James, 2005). These narratives are strengthened through the media, but also by important support networks such as coaches, teachers, and parents. They all act to shape the expectations and motivations of a young

Canadian student-athlete. In many cases, it may shape them to recognize the NCAA or an American sport and academic life as the best possible option.

However, alternative discourses shed a light on the realities of the lives of some NCAA student-athletes in the U.S. While the "full-ride" ideal remains a hallmark perception of recruiters and prospective athletes alike across North America, the reality is that many collegiate athletes face the possibility that their scholarship will not be renewed following a season of intercollegiate participation (Hanlon, 2006). NCAA mandates give their member institutions incredible leverage over student-athletes, as schools have the ability to take a scholarship away from a student-athlete for a number of reasons with immediate effect. This includes if athletes do not remain in good academic standing or fail to make progress towards their degree, refrain from being good citizens, or abstain from participating and following team regulations. In addition, the school has full authority to revoke the award after the term for that year expires without cause (Hanlon, 2006). Further, if a student-athlete were to lose her or his scholarship and may desire to transfer to another school, they must sit out a year of eligibility before they are allowed to resume participation in NCAA competition (Hanlon, 2006). Additionally, Dyck (2011) stated that Canadian youth athletes who do not receive full scholarships may end up paying significantly more money to "go South" than if they had stayed in Canada for university.

There appeared to be reform made by the NCAA in 2011 when it allowed its member institutions to begin offering multiyear scholarships in addition to the already existing one-year renewable contracts that were dispensed. Since 1973, the NCAA had limited the term of all scholarships to one year with the possibility of renewal after the term was completed (Dent, 2013, May 19). However, at the two-year mark following a ruling that had the capacity to give potential student-athletes more rights and bargaining power when negotiating with universities

and colleges, the multiyear scholarship remains to this day a rarity in the NCAA. Since 2013, "according to data of 82 universities at the Division I-A level obtained by the Post-Gazette through open records requests, only 16 have offered more than 10 multiyear scholarships. Thirty-two of the universities have offered between one and 10, and thirty-four have not offered any" (Dent, 2013, May 19).

A reason for the reluctance on the part of NCAA member institutions to grant multiyear scholarships is that while it guarantees their athletes full access to academics, it limits the control that coaches and administrators garner in their pursuit of one of the more important goals of intercollegiate athletics, which is winning. Since 1967, the NCAA has allowed scholarships to be withdrawn from an athlete, creating an employer-employee type of relationship with the university rather than a student-athlete relationship (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). The governing body of American collegiate sport is the source behind the term "student-athlete", implementing and mandating the term in all its publications to cloak such a relationship and counter negative publicity and political pressure against its implementation of athletic scholarships (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). The term "student-athlete" was essentially put in place in an attempt to distinguish college athletes from paid professionals, a distinction that has become harder to maintain over the years but still limits the rights of collegiate athletes. However, Staurowsky and Sack (2005) pointed to the increasing cultural capital of the term "student-athlete", as it has been adopted by the CIS. As a former communications officer within a CIS institution, I used the term regularly within many of my online articles and publications. The CIS, much like the NCAA, has mandated the term in its manuals and on its website. This speaks to the influence and reach the term maintains throughout North American colleges and universities, and serves to reinforce the narrative that collegiate sport participants are "student-athletes", and not professionals. This

benefits the NCAA member institutions while broadening the gap between sport and education and restricting the lives of collegiate athletes.

The purpose of the NCAA was and still remains to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and athletes as an important part of the student body (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2003). However, as the stark increase in revenue due to television contracts pushed the NCAA into becoming more and more of a commercialized body, the interests of individual athletes, both sport and non-sport related, seemed to be pushed aside in favour of the institutional interests that demanded increasing levels of athletic success. This evolution of the NCAA did not however spark a change in its own constitution, as it offers no mention of revenues or commercial agendas while still describing the value of academics and amateurism. Gibson (2012) pointed out that this omission contrasts with a statement on the NCAA website that suggests the term amateur applies to athletes, but not the enterprise itself, calling it a schizophrenic existence.

While the movement of the NCAA to a big-business, billion dollar industry with capitalistic intentions and a win at all costs standard has not brought with it increased welfare for student-athletes (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005), it also creates the illusion that athletic departments and American universities have become increasingly more profitable. However, in 2012 only 23 of 228 athletic departments at NCAA Division I public schools generated enough revenue to cover their expenses (Berkowitz, Upton, & Brady, 2013, May 7). While most schools' athletic programs operate at a loss, some that are successful on a consistent basis can sometimes cover the costs associated with operating an intercollegiate department (Shulman & Bowen as cited in Dyck, 2011). I bring this to light to demonstrate the dissonance between what is accepted as truth as opposed to what is actually true when it comes to our perceptions of collegiate sport in the



U.S. Margolis and Walsh (as cited in Frisby, 2005) claimed that the emphasis on this capitalistic system that honours individual achievement and wealth creation at the expense of humanistic values produce what Frisby termed the "bad sides" of sport.

### **The Power over Student-Athletes**

Hanlon (2006) argued that student participation in intercollegiate athletics is not treated as an extra-curricular activity, but as an occupation whose workers are not given protection from their employers. This occurs in a number of ways. As previously discussed, a scholarship athlete is bound to his or her athletic department through a contractual obligation, which gives the latter the power to terminate the agreement at many points throughout the athlete's career. A prospective student-athlete has very little bargaining power when dealing with compliance officers, who are experts in their field. The intricate details of NCAA compliance rules makes it difficult for both parents and athletes to understand the contractual terms, and the "take-it or leave-it" premise compels the athlete to enter into the contract as stated without being given ample time to understand it (Hanlon, 2006). Further, the hiring of an agent to assist an athlete in negotiating equitably with the potential college or university for a fair contract is strictly forbidden under NCAA Bylaw 12.3, stripping the potential student-athlete of power (NCAA, 2010). Hanlon (2006) also pointed to the restriction on student-athletes' ability to bargain under NCAA contractual documents as another point of suppression by colleges and universities on their athletes.

While the aforementioned power relations take place on a formal level, there are a number of ways that college and university athletic departments suppress student-athletes informally as well. For example, the NCAA has a mandate that limits practice time for its teams to 20 hours per week. However, "most athletes, and those familiar with student athletes' daily

schedule snicker at this somewhat feeble attempt by the NCAA to provide adequate time for academics and limit overbearing athletic responsibilities" (Harrison, Sailes, Rotich & Bimper, 2011, p. 94). Most coaches negotiate these restrictions by holding "non-mandatory" practices or sessions that still hold consequences for those who do not attend (Harrison et al., 2011). Coaches also exercise their power over athletes by "running off" a player. This tactic, commonly used in intercollegiate athletics, involves making the life of one of their athletes so miserable that the athlete chooses to leave of his or her own volition, creating a new scholarship opportunity or an open roster spot for the coach (Hanlon, 2006).

### **The Role of the Student in "Student-Athlete"**

For many intercollegiate athletes, their first year is spent with a stronger focus on athletics than academics (Lally & Kerr, 2005). An athlete would certainly want to make a strong impression on the coaching staff as well as her or his teammates, and the commitment to athletics rather than academics would only be heightened should the participant be bound by the terms of a scholarship. However, the academic identity of student-athletes is an area that should be explored, as they still must be enrolled in classes, maintain a certain GPA and show progress towards graduation in order to be allowed to continue varsity participation. For some athletes, whether on scholarship or not, their athletic commitment and image can have a detrimental effect on their academic life. An athlete with a strong athletic identity is willing to sacrifice other activities in order to focus on his or her sport development. This type of commitment can leave important endeavours such as academic demands off their priority list, which can lead to missed classes and assignments as well as poor grades (Harrison et al., 2011). Further, on many occasions coaches will also attempt to counsel student-athletes on the types of academic programs they should select that would better fit with their athletic demands (Dyck, 2010).

Additionally, the perceptions and attitudes of faculty members and their fellow students can also impact their academic identity. Studies of both the professoriate and non student-athlete populations revealed negative attitudes towards athletes surrounding their academic ability and motivation (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita & Jensen, 2007). Similarly, Baucom and Lantz (2001) revealed prejudice on the part of professors at a division II university, indicating that professors perceived that student-athletes received preferential treatment in areas such as admissions and campus news coverage. This occurred even though at this particular institution athletes maintained GPA's well above the NCAA cut-off for eligibility.

The shaping of a prospective Canadian student-athlete by many social influences can motivate them to aim for a spot on a U.S. intercollegiate team. I have attempted to lay out the context of how the NCAA can be framed to become the "gold" standard for post-secondary athletes by the media, parents, coaches, teachers and athletes themselves. I then showed the critical side of intercollegiate athletics in the U.S., thus identifying the dissonance between these two narratives. As indicated earlier, the media regularly produces stories about young Canadians who win a scholarship award and frame U.S. university and college sports in a positive light. However, media fail to mention athletes who return to Canada early without completing their eligibility or earning a diploma (Dyck, 2010). News sources also leave the impression that the scholarship athletes receive gives them that coveted "full-ride", when in reality the award may not cover all of their tuition and expenses, leaving the difference to be made up by the parents (Dyck, 2011). Further, Dyck (2010) postulates that the personal experiences of Canadian athletes who do not fit the "expected" positive outcomes of "going South" tend not to be circulated as commonly amongst media sources, who would assign blame for failure on the athletes rather than the system itself. Falls and Wilson (2012), whose research observed the

retrospective experiences of Canadian female soccer players who played in the NCAA, argued that little attention has been paid to the structural conditions that frame the experiences of youth athletes.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this exploratory study was to garner a better understanding of the migration to the U.S. by Canadian student athletes through analyzing their athletic and academic experiences in the NCAA. Specifically, my research documented how the practical consciousness of student-athletes regarding the NCAA evolved over their time in the U.S. collegiate sport system, and how fulfilled they felt from an athletic and academic perspective. While there is literature describing the motivational factors shaping Canadian student-athletes' aspirations to move to the NCAA, there is less evidence about whether or not they were fulfilled in their post-secondary endeavours in the U.S. Through the use of Giddens' (1984) duality of structure framework, this study analyzed how Canadian student-athletes were shaped over their experience in the NCAA, whether or not they were faced with hardships that I have described in this section, and how they responded to those conflicts.

One of the responses to negative experiences for Canadian student-athletes was to return to Canada for their post-secondary athletic and academic life, and as such this study will also explore the experiences of those athletes who did not finish their eligibility or graduate from the NCAA institution they first attended and moved back to Canada.

The identities of Canadian student-athletes who participated in the NCAA were also explored. The experiences of athletes are shaped not just by their sporting identity, but other roles they play as well. This included their identity from an academic and social perspective. In

teasing out these themes, I added a holistic and unique perspective to the exploration about the experiences of Canadian NCAA athletes.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study contributed a novel theoretical approach to documenting the experiences of Canadian NCAA athletes within the U.S. collegiate sport structure. Previous studies have used Giddens' duality of structure framework to outline culture within sport organizations (Ponic, 2000), sport coaching communities (Cassidy, 2010), information technology firms (Hussain & Cornelius, 2009), ecological psychology (Shotter, 1983) and organizational membership negotiations (Scott & Myers, 2010). However, research documenting the experiences of Canadian student-athletes have not yet implemented the duality of structure perspective, which can enhance our understanding of how Canadian student-athletes evolve within the NCAA sport structure. This study explored the level of fulfillment Canadian NCAA athletes have in their U.S. collegiate experience, and thus offers a unique contribution to the already existing literature. In addition, analyzing these athletes' experiences through a multi-identity lens, or through their "hybridity" as described by Shogan (2007), allowed for a more holistic description about the Canadian NCAA athlete experience. This approach also presented a novel contribution to the current academic literature on Canadian NCAA student-athletes.

From a sport management perspective, gaining insight into the fulfillment level of Canadian student-athletes who move to the NCAA can be helpful for both American and Canadian university athletic institutions. For U.S. schools, this study can provide a critical, qualitative account of their institutions through the experiences of Canadian student-athletes, which may be useful from a recruitment, student-athlete services perspective. For Canadian athletic departments, this study can provide a rich insight into the experiences of NCAA athletes

whom they would have preferred stayed in Canada for their athletic post-secondary endeavours. A deeper knowledge of the experiences and possible challenges and dilemmas faced by these athletes might allow Canadian university athletic departments to promote their programs as a viable alternative to the NCAA "gold-standard".

In addition, athletic departments as a whole can benefit from the groundwork provided by this study. From an athlete-centred perspective, this study can provide recommendations through the analysis of these athletes' experiences on how university athletic institutions can improve the circumstances of student-athletes in their athletic and academic life while at university. This study may provide recommendations for athletic departments on how to service their student-athletes in a holistic, inclusive manner.

First, I describe Giddens' (1984) duality of structure as an appropriate framework for documenting the experiences of Canadian student-athletes who move to the NCAA. I then present a literature review on Canadian NCAA athlete experiences and outline my research questions. Finally, I present my methodology for answering these questions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

We live in a social world, and our social structures both outline the boundaries of reality as well as act as the medium for social transformation through the agency of knowledgeable people. Sewell (1992) pointed out that multiple definitions of the term structure can be problematic. The rigidness and stability that some associate with structure can lead to ignoring the efficacy of human action, or agency. While structures can appear impermeable to human agency, they are in fact linked in an organic relationship. Paraschak (2000) stated that Giddens' duality of structure framework is relevant to sport managers for three reasons. The first is that it incorporates the broader social context within which sport exists and thus shapes the choices of

those who work within it due to rules and the allocation of resources that govern it. Second, individual actions in sport matter, as agents are not only shaped by the social world of sport but have the ability to shape it as well. Finally, Giddens' (1984) model describes how the unconscious reproduction of "naturalized" sporting practices follows from our practical consciousness and has consequences. This is especially true for those who view sport in different ways as well as those who may be marginalized due to these taken-for-granted sporting norms.

Giddens' (1984) duality of structure theory is an appropriate framework for analyzing the experiences of Canadian student-athletes who participate in NCAA competition. Paraschak (2000) effectively described duality of structure, noting that:

In order to attain the resources... that they require, agents must work within socially constructed, predetermined ways of behaving (or rules). As they follow these procedures to achieve their desired outcomes, they simultaneously reproduce the legitimacy of those structures... for others. When individuals challenge the existing structures, they undermine the unquestioned nature of the structures, providing an opportunity for change to be considered, (p. 154).

As argued in the previous section, many of these athletes negotiate their sporting and academic lives within the NCAA structure, which includes the governing body as well as its member universities and colleges, which shape their athletes through formal and informal rules. The opportunity to participate in an intercollegiate sport in the NCAA, possibly on a scholarship that covers tuition and residence fees, acts as one of many desired outcomes for prospective student-athletes as was discussed earlier. Consequences for resisting or challenging the practices of those in power, the NCAA and universities, are high for student-athletes, who could lose their scholarships, a roster spot and their educational opportunities. So while challenging the existing

structure of the NCAA can help provide a chance for alternative practices, a lack of resources as well as the pressure to adhere to NCAA rules can hamper the ability of a student-athlete to resist such a structure. This describes the existing power relations that privilege the administrators of collegiate sport in the U.S. over their student-athletes.

“People make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx, as cited in Paraschak, 2000, p. 154). Giddens (1984) described duality of structure as the structural properties of social systems which are both the mediums and the outcomes of human action, done through the work of knowledgeable agents. His structuration theory proposed that rules and resources utilized in both the production and reproduction of social action are the means of system reproduction as well. The integral concepts of Giddens' duality of structure framework include structure itself, rules, resources as well as agency and practical consciousness. These concepts are described in more detail below.

### **Structure**

Giddens (1984) proposed that structure is the structuring properties which make it possible for similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and lend them "systemic" form. These social practices are not rigid or concrete in nature, as Giddens emphasizes that structure is not a steady state, but must be regarded as a process. Ponc (2000) argued that social structures are only significant to the extent that agents interact with or realize (consciously or unconsciously) them, and that human beings create their lives within the structural boundaries made up by their predecessors through acts of agency. In Giddens' explanation of social practices, he argued that structure and human agency do not occur in



reaction to each other, but rather that structure is the medium for, and outcome of human agency (Sewell, 1992).

Social historians have previously shown how structures are dual in nature, through the shaping of historical agents' intentions by the cultures or social institutions through which they are born. They have also described how agents can significantly reconfigure, through their own intent or through other pressures, the structures that constituted them (Sewell, 1992). Social justice and advocacy, through the actions of knowledgeable agents, has led to structural shifts throughout history that have promoted equality and diversity of previously marginalized groups. Giddens' duality of structure observes social change occurring through human agency that alters existing social structures.

Sewell (1992) argued that structures can combine depth (history) with great power, and begin to then shape experiences of entire societies over many generations. For example, he stated that capitalism is a highly dynamic and powerful enduring structure, and its ideology has taken hold in Western sport culture. Rowe as cited in Kaufman & Wolff (2010) argued that sport reproduces the capitalist order through "extracting profits from the proletariat while also distracting workers from the real, unequal conditions of their existence," (p. 55). The capitalist structure of sport produces its proletariat in the form of athletes, who go through extensive training to achieve excellence in a very specific function. Because market forces can be significantly influential in the production of high-performance athletes, the benefit of individual expression and human potential can become negated (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). While very few of these athletes make a lavish living in proportion to the mass amounts who do not, the capitalist machine works even harder over student-athletes in the NCAA, who do not have the rights to form unions and are utilized for the profit of the institutions. As mentioned in the previous

section, the NCAA and its member institutions also distract student-athletes from the unequal conditions in which they play through the use of the term student-athlete as a cloak for the employer-employee relationship that takes place.

### **Rules**

For Giddens (1984), rules have two aspects, relating to the constitution of meaning and also to the sanctioning of modes of social conduct. Ponc (2000) described rules as the underlying assumptions and ideologies that exist within agents. They regulate the manner in which agents perceive their own realities, and thus drive human action. The importance of rules is that they attempt to shape the behaviour of agents who work within the structure. This can be done with formal rules that are laid out in codes of conduct or policy, but often times are informal as well. While formal rules may or may not have consequences assigned to them, informal rules can often times be more powerful and influential in social structure. Ponc's (2000) account of the Fitness and Amateur Sport Branch (FASB) Women's Program described an environment where female managers were significantly hampered in their ability to create change within a patriarchal climate at Sport Canada. Similar observations were made by Shaw (2006) in her analysis of gender diversity in sporting organizations. She found that the formation of cliques, especially within "old boys clubs" that governed sport organizations in the United Kingdom (U.K.), formed a significant barrier for women and others who did not meet the standard of those in power to move up in the firms. While no formal rule excluded women from sitting in high power positions within the organization, the informal network restricted them from attaining such heights while grooming those who were "one of the boys" for promotion (Shaw, 2006). Cultural tensions can also lead to the exclusion of individuals through the creation of formal rules. The stigmatization of a First Nations minor hockey league team led to

pressure from Euro Canadian teams in the league to formally ban the players of the Kainai reserve from participation (Robidoux, 2004). This expulsion of a Native team serves to reinforce the boundaries that illustrate the Canadian First Nations as the aggressive "other", reproducing a minor hockey culture that is homogenously white and "acceptable".

## **Resources**

Giddens (1984) referred to resources as the structured properties of social systems which are reproduced by knowledgeable agents in the course of interaction. They are bases of power, through which the agent can assert his or her influence (Ponic, 2000). These resources can exist in a number of forms, including human, monetary and material (tangible). The allocation of resources exercises the influence of those in power; for example the human resources made up of the Eurocentric hockey players and parents used their collective networks to force the expulsion of the minority in the Kainai tribe from their league. Ponic (2000) contrasted the unequal distribution of funding for high performance sport and funding for women's sport, which reproduced the normalized belief that high-performance sport is more legitimate and thus deserving of monetary resources rather than alternatives such as women's sport.

The NCAA asserts its power through the control of rules and resources in the post-secondary collegiate athletics culture over student-athletes. Its ability to grant a free education and residence fees, as well as the ability to withdraw them from athletes allows universities to shape the behaviours of its student-athlete to its advantage. The popularity and legitimacy of the NCAA as a top destination for post-secondary athletes, through the lucrative television contracts and money that is poured into state-of-the-art athletic facilities, also makes them particularly desirable for men's football and men's basketball athletes. In addition, social capital can be accumulated through intangible resources such as the notoriety that comes with competing in the

NCAA. Bourdieu (as cited in Groeneveld, Houlihan & Ohl, 2011) stated that this can be gained through participation in social networks which have access to economic resources or other forms of capital. In the case of the NCAA, a powerful social institution, student-athletes may conform to the rules set out by this structure in order to be able to participate and reap the perceived personal benefits.

However, as previously mentioned, the culture of intercollegiate sport in the U.S. is shaped to benefit the athletic institutions rather than the athletes. Informally, NCAA institutions can restrict the freedom of athletes to devote time to their academics amongst other interests. Formally, the NCAA can restrict the ability of athletes to transfer to another institution if they are released from their current team by forcing them to sit out a year after transferring. The latter is also true for both high school and intercollegiate athletics in Canada. Conversely, NCAA regulations grant power to their member institutions, compliance officers and coaches in terms of bargaining abilities with prospective student-athletes. This creates an unequal power relationship, leaving collegiate athletes with little freedom to maneuver unless they conform to the expectations and rules of this structure.

### **Agency**

Giddens (1984) stated that to be a human being is to be an agent. His description of duality of structure stated that while structures can either facilitate or restrict the action of agents, those agents can also act to either challenge or reproduce structures (Ponic, 2000). Agency refers to "doing" (Giddens, 1984). The consequences of this "doing", whether intentionally or unintentionally, are events which would not have happened if the agent had behaved differently (Giddens, 1984). Some argue that agency is the ability to "act otherwise" or intervene in order to influence a specific process or state of affairs. However, rather than the frequently accepted

discourse that defines agency by its intent, Giddens suggested that agency refers to the capability of an agent to "do something" in the first place. This "capability" is defined in terms of the resources agents have at their disposal and/or whether or not they benefit from the informal and formal rules of their social structure.

**Agency to challenge.** To have agency is to garner power. This framework can be transformational for marginalized groups or individuals who many would assume have no power or control over their lives. While unequal power relations exist, agency still characterizes all persons (Sewell, 1992). Thus, the minority is not stripped of all its power, though it may hold considerably less than a mainstream group. But human agents are knowledgeable and enabled, and are capable of practicing reflexivity and garnering a creative strategy in response to the status quo (Giddens, 1983). Further, Sewell (1992) stated that this agency is not just individual, but collective in nature as well. The coordination of one's actions with others can increase human resources which in turn can persuade or impact the existing power relations and structure in a meaningful fashion. Frisby (2005) argued that from a critical social science perspective, the exploration of alternative structures, through observing the agency in that area, can help to disrupt dominant discourses and enhance social transformation. Further, Shogan (2007) encouraged a type of agency that transcends conformity to any rules or standards, but similarly to Giddens she implored the need for a reflexive state of mind. She stated that ethics "involves an investigation not only of one's relationship to moral codes but a tracing of those standards or norms that shape one's action and behaviour" (p. 126). By agents taking part in this active and ongoing questioning of how certain practices came to be normalized, they can actively refuse those practices that are not in line with their values. This refusal is a form of challenging the existing structures, creating the possibility for change.

**Agency to challenge in sport.** The previous sections have pointed out the constraints that may hold athletes, specifically those who participate in NCAA collegiate athletics, under the power of collegiate athletic institutions. As Kaufman and Wolff stated: "athletes are expected to play and not protest" (2010, p. 156). Athletes who do become advocates for social change are more likely to receive a backlash from the media and public alike (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010; Candaele & Dreier, June 28 2004). This may be a significant factor supporting the image that many athletes seem to participate in an environment that is free of political and social issues. This points to the dehumanization of athletes, whose bodies and athletic performances are utilized for commercialized purposes similar to the working class proletariat in a capitalist society, dismissing their potential as human beings. This is somewhat true both for professional sport as well as collegiate "amateur" sport in the U.S. However, athletes have and continue to speak out as active agents for highlighting social injustices. The more resources, or facets of power they garner, the more able athletes are to create change.

A "social consciousness" can be developed through what Giddens (1984) called "reflexive monitoring". Individuals can become more aware of how their current situation affects them as well as others negatively or positively, developing a social consciousness that can influence their "agency" abilities (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). Pelak (2005) identified two major prerequisites for collective action agreed upon amongst social movement scholars. One is the degree of openness in the political order, and the second is the shared understanding of injustice amongst a group of individuals. In the post-Apartheid era in South Africa, the first sign of restructuring and agency in women's netball, a once traditionally conservative, upper-class sport played by white women, involved the historic appointment of the first African president of the sport organization (Pelak, 2005). This was a strong example of agents who garnered power and

desired social justice changing the "status-quo" of the athletics culture in South Africa. By mandating that team's have 40% representation of both White and Black players on their respective rosters, the sport federation made a deliberate attempt to increase inclusion of Black athletes in the game. The addition of Black athletes on the national netball team also served as a powerful symbol of progress along the racial lines within women's netball in South Africa.

Kaufman and Wolff (2010) also documented the reflexiveness of Olympian Kevin McMahon, who after hearing about the exploitation of sweatshop workers in major athletic wear companies, realized he was only further legitimizing the process by wearing their brand in his competition.

There are also examples of challenging agency at the NCAA level. This was exemplified through the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) football team, who were made aware of an attempt to pass a proposition to end affirmative action in the state (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). After a meeting with the Black Student Union at the University in which the team's social consciousness was shaped to become active in the fight against the proposition, the team utilized the resource they had at their disposal: the popularity of college football. Using national television as their platform in their next game, the football team wore black armbands protesting the proposition. This provided an alternative narrative for those seeking to oppose the proposition, giving the less fortunate a voice on the issue. As a coach, Jim Keady also quit his position with the St. John's University men's team because of their affiliation with Nike and sweatshop labour (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010).

In contrast, when we refer back to Pelak's (2005) two prerequisites for collective social action, the degree of openness in the political order and a shared understanding of injustice, we can outline the challenges faced by the women attempting to champion the Sport Canada Policy on Women in Sport (Ponic, 2000). Assessing the degree of openness in the organization, the

females struggled working under a patriarchal environment to create more equitable standards for women in sport. There was also a lack of understanding or care for the work done by many of these women to develop more inclusive gender measures that were to be passed on to the national sport organizations (NSO's). For example, the NSO's did not comply with any of the directives set out in the Policy, illustrating a lack of resources on the part of the women who attempted to implement it. Their lack of authority, funding received and support from Sport Canada's leaders, all critical resources in Giddens' duality of structure, hampered the ability for these women to create meaningful change.

**Agency to reproduce.** While I've discussed the agency of those in marginalized positions, agency is also garnered by those who have a great deal of power as well. For example, Sewell (1992) stated that the agency of males as fathers, executives and professors are greatly expanded by the positions that they occupy in various familial, social and professional circles. However, frequently those who garner a lot of power through the existing social structure are reluctant to give it up. As mentioned in the previous section, the reluctance on the part of the NCAA when considering allowing multiyear scholarships was that it would lose power over student-athletes as well as face the possibility of draining desirable resources should the athlete not have a prosperous collegiate sport career. The action on the part of the NCAA to allow multiyear scholarships as simply an option for student-athletes is an example of accommodation. While the NCAA can show that it is changing policy to enhance the lives of student-athletes, it quietly maintains the status quo considering a small portion of its member institutions actually offering multiyear awards. So while the marginalized group, in this case student-athletes receives a small bit of power or rights, the overall power relationship is maintained for collegiate sport administrators.



**Agency to dominate.** There is also an opportunity for social agents to dominate a social structure. This occurs when agents use their influence or expertise in a given situation while utilizing the resources of power and conforming to the rules. This is done while being recognized and approved by other agents (Hussain & Cornelius, 2009).

### **Practical Consciousness**

Giddens (1984) stated that practical consciousness is fundamental to structuration theory. The idea of practical consciousness is that a structure, idea, or belief has been normalized and reproduced over and over until it eventually comes to be accepted as a given "truth". Giddens (1984) believed that agents are highly learned in the knowledge of day-to-day social encounters to the point where they behave or act in certain ways without thinking consciously about it. He proposed that this non-conscious application of knowledge has taken-for-granted qualities that enable us to simply do things while concentrating on other activities that require conscious effort (Cassidy, 2010). While this is very useful for mundane tasks that may not require critical thought, from a sociological perspective the normalization of behaviours, truths or actions can be problematic when they marginalize a certain group of individuals. For example, the medical model of disability works from a biological perspective that labels the individual as "disabled", and is the dominant narrative on the subject (Brittain, 2004). The consequences of a practical consciousness that "impairs" the individual rather than a social context which the "disabled" person must negotiate leads to negative societal and personal perceptions of himself or herself. While these consequences are unintended as Giddens (1984) described, the continued reproduction of this particular dominant model still regularly harms those who are not congruent with its normalizing qualities, in this case disabled athletes. This non-reflexive feedback cycle is referred to as a causal loop, and is also the case for the particular way that Western culture views

sport. Paraschak (2000) stated that professional sport is one of many different versions of its kind, but it has become "the" sport through its dominance in our culture and media. This disproportionately favours the type of sport that is capitalistic and restrictive by nature, while delegitimizing sport-for-all endeavours such as recreation and free unstructured play that could be accessible by many more. However, due to practical consciousness, we in North America have come to accept that high-performance and professional sport is "the way" to participate in sport, creating a culture where Canadian student-athletes may become more motivated to move to the NCAA.

Having described the theoretical underpinning that guided my research, I now document the previous literature noting the agency practiced by those in sport as well as outlining the experiences of both Canadian and American student-athletes.

### **The "Hybrid" Experience of Student-Athletes**

As previously discussed there are a number of factors that shape prospective student-athletes in such a way that they become motivated to pursue intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. Referring again to Shogan's "hybrid" athlete, we must also observe the other identities that make up our student-athletes. Falls and Wilson (2012) argued that young athletes do not experience sport in isolation, but share their experiences with their peers and also take in other interests that occur in their lives. Thus, their athletic experiences and identity both shape and are shaped by their diverse life roles, or their "hybridity".

The obvious identity associated with these young men and women would be their role as students at their various educational institutions. The racial identities that make up our student-athletes are also major as are their gendered identities. The college experience for male and female collegiate athletes may be quite different. When it comes to the commercialization of

sport in the NCAA, and professional sport, we tend to see far more coverage of male than female sports. This, amongst other factors, could affect the motivation and experiences of the different genders. While I will not be directly tracking the experiences of transgendered athletes in this study, I feel it imperative to note that they may too have alternative experiences. I next outline the literature noting the experiences of student-athletes through the lens of their hybrid identities, including their academic, racialized and gendered roles.

### **The Student Role**

It is noted in the literature that when it comes to student-athletes, often times the "athlete" role takes precedence over the "student" role. This is not only common for collegiate players in the U.S., but in Canada as well. In their research exploring the central components in the lives of intercollegiate student-athletes who played in Canada, Miller and Kerr (2002) found that sport played a larger role in the academic decisions of high school athletes than some may have anticipated. The participants in the study generally felt that they were unable to completely fulfill any of their identities, including academic, athletic and social, and thus had to make compromises between them. This is consistent with Shogan's "hybrid" athlete, as the individual must explore the gaps in their identity and make choices about what is important to them. The findings suggested that for the most part, athletes seem to hold their athletic identity as being of utmost importance, especially in the early years of their post-secondary lives. Miller and Kerr (2002) stated that athletes tend not to commit themselves academically in the first year, instead focusing more on their athletic lives. Student-athletes tend to define themselves through their athletic involvement, and put extra effort into being recognized as athletes as compared to other areas of their student life (Lally & Kerr, 2005). This strong athletic identity usually eliminated other interests, as they prioritized their training above all else (Harrison et al., 2011). In addition,

a number of other factors were identified in prompting disengagement from academics that resulted in poor scholarly performances. These included fatigue from training and competing as well as the time spent travelling for matches, negative treatment from the faculty and pressures from coaches and alumni (Miller & Kerr, 2002). This was consistent with Dyck's (2010) research documenting Canadian athletes who moved to the NCAA, whose athletic expectations left them unable to devote more time to academics. Both studies also found that a social gap was created, separating the athletes from their non-athlete peers in classes.

However, Miller and Kerr (2002) found that as their participants reached the upper years of university, academics began to take up more of their focus rather than athletics. This was also true of student-athletes' career plans, which progressed over the course of their studies as their athletic identity decreased (Lally & Kerr, 2005). This contrasts with some literature documenting U.S. student-athletes, which is logical especially considering that some athletes may be on scholarship, obligating them to continue focusing on athletics throughout their post-secondary experience. Findings by Adler and Adler (as cited in Miller & Kerr, 2002) showed that male basketball players became more disinterested with academics over their college career. This could be due to the commercialization of men's athletics in the U.S., as their female counterparts became more interested in academics, consistent with Miller and Kerr's findings. However, there is evidence to show that athletics may take more of a student-athlete's identity in the U.S. Athletes who were on scholarship at schools in the U.S. spoke of the intensity, competitiveness and employer-employee relationship that existed in their time "down South". A participant in Dyck's (2010) study described her athletic experience in the NCAA:

I think it's really a job. It's a full-time job... so I think you're a little duped in what you think is going to happen. I think coaches in Canada actually look at the player as a human being, where I really feel... in the U.S. that it's like you're a commodity (p. 47).

This was echoed by Harrison et al. (2011), who stated that athletic commitments forced them to give up other interests that usually make up a significant amount of time, such as school, as "a college athlete's schedule is highly intolerant of conflicts with practice and competition..." (p. 94). Further, those athletes on scholarships are even more obligated to take part in all training sessions, even "non-mandatory" ones. They also miss out on courses that they are interested in, as they must cater their academic schedule to their athletic one (Dyck, 2010). This can be detrimental when athletes begin to develop stronger career aspirations in their senior years of college or university if they did not garner the academic qualifications in order to reach those goals (Lally & Kerr, 2005).

**Perceived benefits for the student.** However, there is contrasting evidence that athletic demands may be a catalyst or at the very least a non-factor in student-athletes' academic life. Miller and Kerr (2002) found that participants felt like success in their athletic realm helped to either reduce their stress levels or motivate success and time management in other parts of their life, including academics. Gaston-Gayles (2004) also showed that both career athletic motivation and student-athletic motivation were not significant factors in determining academic success or motivation. Rather it was academic motivation on its own, independent of athletic factors, which was critical in predicting future success in the classroom. Further, the attachment of female soccer players to their team in the NCAA helped their transition to college life and living away from home (Falls & Wilson, 2012). They felt that the support network created by their teammates helped alleviate the loss of their family support system once they left home, and

believed that this was a benefit of being a student-athlete. Additionally, in an exploration of the academic success of athletes on scholarship at one school in the U.S., Milton, Freeman and Williamson (2012) found that students who were awarded a scholarship at any amount (full, half, part) were more likely to have a grade-point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher relative to their non-scholarship peers. However, there were a number of factors that could have affected this outcome. The institution mandated that scholarship athletes keep a GPA of 3.0 or higher in order to retain the award, whereas the cut-off by the NCAA is 2.0. Second, there was no analysis of the types of classes that were taken, which could have affected the results. There were certain courses in some universities that may be considered "athlete-friendly", where special privileges may be given to athletes in order to succeed with the appropriate marks. Third, there was a significant trend in the gender differences taken from the study. While female athletes did not hold as many scholarships as males, the proportion of female scholarship athletes who maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher was significantly higher than the males. The authors omitted the percentages that show 76% of female athletes with scholarships held GPA's of 3.0 or higher, compared to just 48% from male scholarship athletes. Further, 62% of female non-scholarship athletes scored at 3.0 or higher, while just 39% of male non-scholarship athletes did the same.

### **The Gender Role**

This gender difference in academic performance is mirrored in other research observing academic motivation amongst student-athletes. Meyer (as cited in Miller & Kerr, 2002) noted that similar demands by their athletic identity encouraged both better achievement and commitment to their academic life over four years of university amongst female athletes. Similar findings were observed by Falls and Wilson (2012), who described that their participants, all former NCAA female soccer players, believed that their athletic identity actually helped their

academic identity. The participants noted factors such as support from athletic departments through academic counselors and "athlete-friendly" teachers. While the former may seemingly be a good example of support from athletic departments, the notion of an athlete-friendly teacher may lower the academic standard of a university if they are making concessions to some students simply because they are an athlete. As discussed earlier, a factor in gender differences could be the increased commercialization in men's sport as well as more avenues for movement into professional sport after graduation. However, this may only apply to higher market-driven sports such as men's basketball and football, which receive more television coverage than other intercollegiate athletic events. Simons, Van Rhee and Covington (1999) had two interesting findings. The first was that non-revenue generating sport athletes had higher motivation to succeed academically. The second was that female athletes who play in revenue sports such as women's basketball still had a higher academic commitment than their male counterparts.

### **Racial Identity**

For many African-American male student-athletes, developing their racial identity can evolve on a parallel pathway with their athletic identity (Harrison et al., 2011). James (2005) found similar results when he documented the lives of five African Canadian youth who aspired to play basketball on scholarship in the U.S. Within their subculture, James argued that their athletic ability was perceived as a signifier of blackness and a means to gain prestige amongst their peers. Further the students were seeking significant social and financial awards that they believed they would receive from going to schools down South. They believed strongly that a U.S. scholarship could provide this for them, even though the chances of them earning a "full-ride" scholarship or going professional were fairly remote (James, 2005). Singer and May's (2010) case study of a black American basketball player revealed a similar result, as their

analysis described an "aspirational capital" narrative. Yosso (as cited in Singer & May, 2010) defined this as when individuals hold onto hope in the face of social inequality even though they do not have the resources to turn their aspirations into a reality. The belief that their case study participant could beat the odds and "make it" is also reflected in James' (2003, 2005) results. However, for black male athletes, the goal of playing basketball on scholarships in the U.S. has become ingrained in their culture and identity, which for these athletes may be a major motivating factor in their continued pursuit of a goal which for most is not realistic. James (2005) illustrated strategies these students used to increase their athletic opportunities in the U.S., such as choosing the right high school and seeking more exposure. The author also highlighted how these black athletes exercised their agency within this particular subculture, which holds athletics as a high priority. The same cannot be said for academics. Their practical consciousness, what they have come to believe as a given, shaped them to believe that the best way to furthering themselves was through their athleticism. This "truth" guided their tactics and strategies in an effort to win a scholarship down South, which was only further reproduced at the university they attended. Sperber (as cited in James, 2005), stated that these men "are treated as "black gladiators," brought to campuses mainly to play sports, not to obtain a meaningful education" (p. 100). This racialized identity of black athletes is readily apparent among coaches, administrators, professors and other students, reinforcing the practical consciousness and shaping the behaviour of black athletes to meet these expectations. This study aims to continue exploring the other identities of Canadian student-athletes and how it shapes their athletic identity.

### **The "Dumb-Jock" Stigma**

Another factor in student-athletes' competing identities of sport and school is the negative perceptions harboured by those around them in the academic realm. Harrison et al. (2011) stated



that “those who cheer on game day and sneer on Monday are just as culpable as those that play the game,” (p. 94). While I previously mentioned that some professors can be “athlete-friendly”, there is also substantial research showing that university faculty hold unfavourable attitudes toward student-athletes (Baucom & Launz, 2001). Literature describing similar negative attitudes from fellow students is also available (Simons et al., 2007). Further, a significant portion of athletes see themselves as being stigmatized in the academic community (Simons et al., 2007). This portion increased when sampling athletes who were male; played a revenue-generating sport; or were of African-American descent (Simons et al., 2007). In contrast, female student-athletes have been documented as having higher levels of academic success and motivation, regardless of whether they were or were not participating in revenue-generating sports or receiving scholarship awards. Female athletes also did not feel as stigmatized in academics as males. Additionally, race has become a factor again in negative perceptions towards student-athletes. African-American identity may be valuable during the sporting event, but it can hold black student-athletes back in an academic environment due to negative perceptions about them by their peers and the professoriate (Harrison et al., 2011). This can have negative consequences for the academic experiences of these student-athletes.

This stigmatization problem is more complex because athletes are seen as both privileged and disinterested in academics, not normally a characteristic of an ostracized group. Many marginalized groups such as visible minorities or those with a disability are still perceived as being motivated academically in contrast with the perception of student-athletes (Simons et al., 2007). This can restrict the social circles of student-athletes significantly, as they may have trouble forming relationships outside of their athletic teams. Certain privileges that they receive can ostracize them from the rest of the student-body (Dyck, 2011). A former student-athlete in

the NCAA described her athlete status as a social liability: “I feel like a lot of the students, well not a lot but some of the students look down on you and think you're stupid just because you are an athlete” (Dyck, 2011, p. 63).

In the study done by Simons et al. (2007), student-athletes would usually respond in one of two ways. They would either reject the stereotype and work harder in the academic environment, or accept and perpetuate the stereotype by dropping a course, not attending or not participating in class. Athletes who rejected the "dumb-jock" illustration did so by seeking out more demanding courses than what their coaches suggested (Dyck, 2010). Intriguing is the prospect of coaches having the ability to select their athletes' courses, a revealing example of the power athletics has over academics in the NCAA.

### **The Athlete Identity Post-Graduation**

For many student-athletes, there is a strong shift in identity as they approach the end of their collegiate careers. The majority of university athletes do not move on to professional sports, leaving them with a significant change in their lives after they conclude intercollegiate eligibility. Harrison et al. (2011) found that student-athletes who prioritized their lives around their sport during their college life faced significant difficulty post-graduation. Further, Falls and Wilson (2012) found their participants' identity fell into crisis because it had been so linked with athletics throughout university, which is similar to other high-performance athletes who come to the end of their playing career. A former female NCAA player reflected on her identity after her post-secondary career:

... because at twenty-one or twenty-two when your basketball career is done your identity is out the window, right? Because you identify with it, it's your identity for so long; you

just have to remember that your identity is going to end and what is going to be the next thing that you're going to want to do? (Dyck, 2010, p. 48).

Harrison et al. (2011) argued that encouraging explorations of other identities is crucial in the development of a healthy student-athlete.

### **Research Questions**

The review of literature has first described the factors that can influence the aspirations of a Canadian student-athlete to move to the NCAA for their athletic and academic endeavours. I have also outlined some aspects of the NCAA from a more critical approach, and described how the structure of post-secondary institutions in the U.S. may be detrimental for the development of student-athletes, both from an athletic and a humanistic perspective. I then built upon this critical approach to observing the NCAA through Giddens' duality of structure framework, which I utilized in documenting the experiences of Canadian student-athletes in the NCAA. In particular, I assessed the use of agency and the evolution, if any, of practical consciousness as described by Giddens (1984) in order to guide this study. Further, by documenting the literature outlining the experiences of North American athletes through the lens of their unique identities, I also introduced the "hybrid" athlete term into my analysis, which guided this study as well.

What the current literature lacks is an in-depth exploration of how Canadian student-athletes who participate in the NCAA feel in terms of their level of fulfillment throughout their experiences. I have presented research that highlights how the NCAA has been shaped to be perceived as the "gold-standard" for post-secondary pursuits, and how this can become a part of our practical consciousness.

However, is this "practical consciousness" challenged at all throughout the post-secondary athletic experience of a Canadian NCAA athlete? The research I have presented

provides qualitative accounts of Canadian athletes from both positive and negative sides when it comes to their experiences in the U.S. However, did these student-athletes practice reflexivity at all throughout their time in the NCAA and has their practical consciousness been challenged?

Giddens (1984) refers to practical consciousness as a structure, idea, or belief that has been normalized over time to become accepted as a given “truth” or “the way”. The exploration of whether or not Canadian student-athletes had their practical consciousness about the NCAA altered throughout their post-secondary experiences will assist us in understanding whether their expectations were fulfilled for moving to the U.S. It also allows us to explore the agency of these athletes. If they did encounter a disruption to their practical consciousness in terms of how they perceived the NCAA experience, how did they respond? Did they at all attempt to actively question practices that have become normalized, and then refuse to take part in them if they were in violation of their own values, as Shogan (2007) implores athletes to do?

This information is useful for gaining a greater understanding of how Canadian student-athletes are shaped as they progress through the NCAA system. Further, exploring the answers to these questions could help us understand, for example, why some athletes do not finish their degree in the NCAA and decide to return to Canada for athletic opportunities and/or academic reasons, a topic currently not well addressed in the literature. As guided by these questions arising from the literature, my first research question was the following:

Research Question 1: Are Canadian student-athletes who move to the NCAA fulfilled in their U.S. collegiate experience?

Sub-Problem 1: How did their practical consciousness regarding U.S. collegiate sport evolve over the course of their experience?

Sub-Problem 2: Did they encounter moments of dilemma/conflict with their practical consciousness or their experience, and how did they react? What form did their agency take? Additionally within Sub-Problem 1, I made the following assumption based on the literature review: prospective Canadian student-athletes do not question that the NCAA is the best route for athletic pursuits, and this shapes their actions to move to the U.S. for the collegiate experience. Academically, Canadian student-athletes may believe that the NCAA is better or worse for them than going to university or college in Canada, but this doesn't influence their decision to the same degree as their practical consciousness regarding the collegiate athletic experience.

I also explored how these athletes are influenced by their other identities which allow us to understand how they negotiate their sporting endeavours from a holistic perspective. By exploring this in discussion with Canadian NCAA athletes, we can attempt to observe the "gaps" that are created through the "hybrid" identity, and note the strategies utilized by these participants to resolve them. This can allow for sport practitioners to gain a better understanding of the athlete in all their facets, creating a holistic approach to servicing them in a healthier, more inclusive manner. Further, nurturing the whole student-athlete can allow them to succeed after their collegiate playing days are over. With my research question and sub-problems laid out, I next provide the methodological framework which guided this research study.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

**Characteristics.** Twelve semi-structured interviews were completed with participants being restricted to two distinct population pools. The first pool (Group 1, n=7) was limited to former NCAA Canadian student-athletes who completed their education and athletic eligibility

(four years) in the U.S. This ensures the study will garner a number of former student-athletes who had a full NCAA experience upon which they can critically reflect. The second participant pool (Group 2, n=5) was limited to former NCAA Canadian student-athletes who did not complete their athletic eligibility or graduate from the U.S. college or university in which they first enrolled. This pool of former NCAA Canadian student-athletes who came back to Canada for athletic and/or academic post-secondary completion. None of the participants in the study were currently an NCAA athlete, as the procedure involved retrospective interviews that documented their past experience in the NCAA. Dividing the study into two distinct groups, former Canadian NCAA athletes who completed their eligibility and degree and those who did not, allows for a more holistic approach to this qualitative research. By broadening the pool of participants, my research explored multiple perspectives and behaviours that occur in the NCAA sport structure (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, eligible participants were no more than five years removed from their last season of NCAA participation. This allows the data to reflect a more current narrative on these experiences.

**Recruitment.** I recruited 7 participants for Group 1 and 5 participants for Group 2 (those who began in the NCAA but did not finish eligibility and did not graduate). There are a number of studies observing the experiences of student-athletes who interview between 8 and 12 participants (Falls & Wilson, 2012; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Miller & Kerr, 2002), and one researcher who conducted a 5-person focus group (James, 2003). In addition, Dyck's (2010) account of Canadian student-athletes' experiences in the NCAA described the experiences of five specific athletes in the body of his text, though he does not specify the total number of participants interviewed for the study.

Participants in this study were recruited after obtaining research ethics approval.

Participants were recruited using both personal and professional connections I have made in the field. This includes connections that I have made as an athlete over the past number of years, and also through CIS athletes and coaches that I have worked with throughout my occupational life.

### **Data Collection**

I conducted twelve semi-structured retrospective interviews with the participants in this research study. As qualitative research is not limited by claims of objectivity, semi-structured interviews allow researchers to be active in the situation and use probing methods to gain further knowledge or depth on a topic from the participant (Markula & Silk, 2011). An interview guide containing open-ended questions based on the approach provided by Markula & Silk (2011) was created.

Open-ended questions allow for a stronger in-depth analysis and a more meaningful conversation about the topic. I utilized clarification and elaboration probes throughout each of the interviews. Clarification probes allow the researcher to explain an idea or phrase, and will resemble "Can you explain what you meant by that?" or "Can you give me an example of this?" (Miller & Kerr, 2002). These were employed to ensure that the data is analyzed correctly and there is more understanding on potentially confusing answers. Elaboration probes were utilized to gather more information and probe a topic in greater depth, and can include "Can you tell me more about this?" (Miller & Kerr, 2002).

The interviews began by asking participants to provide some information for classification purposes. This included their name, age, what sport they played, what position they played, the year they began and the year they finished playing, as well as their racial background

and gender. Participants were also asked if they obtained a scholarship to play in the NCAA, and if so what type of scholarship (e.g., full-ride, part-scholarship).

I then conducted the interviews in chronological order as per the interview guide displayed in Appendix A and Appendix B. This guide included a script with open-ended questions, and begins by documenting the student-athletes' aspirations to go the route of the NCAA, and what may have triggered them to consider it. Their experiences during the "recruitment phase" were noted, including what promises were made and expectations created during this period, and how it shaped their practical consciousness. This was followed by documenting the evolution of their practical consciousness and their agency from their first year of eligibility and so on. Because one group of the sample will be those who returned to Canada for athletic and/or academic pursuits, two guides were created in order to include appropriate questions for that particular cohort of interviewees. The second guide for athletes who returned to Canada without finishing their eligibility (Group 2) included the documentation of the "breaking point", which is the time period in which they chose to leave. It also included their post-secondary athletic and academic experiences in Canada and its comparison to the NCAA experience.

Markula and Silk (2011) stated that the interview guide must be prepared based on the research themes to create the exact questions and their logical relationship to the purpose. Referring back to my research question, I based the interview guide on the following themes: the level of fulfillment that Canadian NCAA student-athletes had in their NCAA collegiate experience from an athletic and academic perspective; the exploration of their evolving practical consciousness throughout their NCAA experience; whether or not they encountered dilemmas or conflicts and how they reacted to them; exploring their academic and social identities and how it



shaped their experience. Pilot interviews were conducted with Returning Athlete 1 (R1) and Full-term Athlete 1 (F1) in order to test my interview guide and take feedback from a colleague. After analysis of the first two interviews, there were no alterations to the interview guide, deeming it appropriate to include those pilot interviews in the data collection.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, with the transcriptions then being coded, for analysis. I implemented the use of the NVivo qualitative analysis software to assist in more efficient coding and analysis of my data. Bergin (2011) reported that NVivo 8 is a valuable tool to utilize in qualitative research.

Major themes, unique themes and other themes were identified for the first several transcriptions (Creswell, 2009). Abbreviations, or keywords if using NVivo, for the found topics were made as codes and utilized to highlight sections of the remaining interview transcriptions, and from there major sections were created from the data in my preliminary analysis. Creswell (2009) recommended using five to seven categories or themes that will appear as the major findings of the research. Interview analysis in the critical paradigm involves recognition of the self-reflexive role of the researcher as well as the ideological or political agenda often hidden in one's work (Markula & Silk, 2011). This approach is useful because it enables the investigator to situate the research in the wider social context, which is what I will attempt to accomplish in my analysis of the data. Markula and Silk (2011) adapted Johnson's four dialogic moments of interpretation for the researcher to proceed with in their data analysis. The first dialogic moment is the recalling dialogue, where the researcher thinks about the impressions accumulated during and after the collection of empirical data. The second is termed listening around, and involves the process of transcribing, coding and indexing to highlight themes. This is designed to assist in

placing the empirical material within existing literatures and a time to reassess my assumptions or ideas about the research. The third dialogue is close reading, where the researcher begins thinking about creating the narrative. This involves asking how my research will be connected to social forces and how I will present the data to be socially meaningful. The final dialogue is the representing self and others stage, also known as the writing-up process.

Qualitative reliability was assured through clearly documenting the different steps involved in the research process, checking transcriptions to make sure they do not contain obvious mistakes, and clearly defining the meaning of the codes that are created from the data to ensure there is not a "drift" in their definition. Qualitative validity was assisted by providing a very detailed description of the setting and providing multiple perspectives about them (Creswell, 2009). While my personal experiences and background, shape my interpretation of the findings, I presented data that ran counter to the major themes in order to illustrate a broad narrative of the results.

## **Results**

I laid out the results section (See Appendix C), which I first address through participants' experience and shaping of their practical consciousness before moving to the NCAA. Second, I illustrate the practical consciousness of the participants in their reflections (post-experience), their level of fulfillment, and elements that shaped both. Section II outlines the academic and social fulfillment of the participants in their post-secondary lives. Because the participants were motivated mostly through their athletic aspirations to move to the NCAA, it is not appropriate to group their academic and social experiences in Section I. The rich foundation of their practical consciousness and expectations regarding athletics was not mirrored with their academic and social roles. Thus, there is not an appropriate starting point to measure their practical

consciousness and fulfillment in this regard. However, because the collegiate journey includes not just athletics, but academic and social experiences that can also significantly affect their fulfillment, I included their narratives in a separate section. Section III illustrates the results to Research Question 2, which entails the types of dilemmas that arose during the participants' tenure in the NCAA and how they reacted to these conflicts. Section III outlines the agency of the student-athletes under the NCAA structure. For participant characteristics, see Appendix D.

### **Section I: Practical Consciousness**

#### **Shaping of practical consciousness.**

*NCAA as the "gold-standard"*. Participants reported that their initial impressions of the NCAA were shaped primarily through exposure to mass media as well as close social influences such as coaches and parents. The "gold-standard" ideal was communicated by the majority of the athletes, many of whom constructed the NCAA experience as an invaluable opportunity. Many mentioned a certain hype or excitement associated the NCAA, illustrated through its media exposure. R5, a basketball player, described how his particular "Division I dream" was shaped while going through high school:

The crowd, it was definitely the intensity and even to this day I will sit down and watch an NCAA game over an NBA game just because of how intense they were when they play the game... the excitement... and the whole environment of NCAA sports is really why I fell in love.

R1, who was not on a scholarship, stated that he would rather take an opportunity to experience a year as a walk-on at an NCAA major division I institution than be on scholarship in Canada. R3 was shaped by "March Madness" from an early age, and grew up watching collegiate basketball with her family, and described that Canadians tend to feel like going to the States as a post-

secondary athlete was a "big deal". These sentiments were shared by athletes who did not participate in "market-driven" sports. F7, a multi-sport athlete of volleyball and softball who attended a division II school with a small enrollment, stated:

... it would be so cool to [go to the NCAA]... my idea was... everyone that goes to school in the States is part of a division I school-like atmosphere... I wanna be part of that... I'm gonna be on TV, you know what I mean?

This shaped many of the participants in looking to the NCAA as the most ideal destination for their post-secondary ventures, particularly in comparison to attending university in Canada. The experience of going to the NCAA was seen as the "ultimate accomplishment" as stated by F2, while R4 explained that the CIS was a "fall-back" option in case his experience down south did not work out. This was echoed by a number of those interviewed, who saw the NCAA as more competitive with better athletes and more athletic opportunities than what was offered for them in their home country. F1 stated that, "The biggest thing for me was... this is... the pinnacle of athletics... the level of competition was much higher in the States in that time than it is now in Canada". R2 reiterated this, stating:

When I was starting to play... competitively I didn't really know a lot about the NCAA, I just knew that... was kind of the next step in girls' sports in general, if you were a higher level playing athlete... you would get a scholarship and go to the States.

**Scholarships.** All but one of the participants garnered a full or partial scholarship to their respective NCAA institutions. With tuition costs being significantly increased for international students, having their school and residence covered throughout their tenure was paramount for a number of the participants, who would not have been able to afford going to the States otherwise.

Additionally, the idea of having no debt coming out of university was also an attractive resource to these athletes. F6 stated:

growing up I knew nothing about the NCAA... when I got more... serious into sports, my coach at the time said with your skill you could go to school for free, and that's what sparked my interest... the idea of not having to pay for school and still get to play a sport.

This was also evident in R4's account, who had not planned on going to college until he realized he could go on a full-ride scholarship. As a result, he quit his other sports when he was 16 years of age and specialized in basketball to hone his skill and begin his journey to the NCAA.

A few of the participants also noted the perceived lack of scholarship availability in Canada, stating that CIS institutions do not have the ability to give full scholarships, or that they do not offer financial assistance for athletes at all, even though the latter claim is not true. Interestingly, two of these participants did not have "full-ride" scholarships in the States, and paid \$10,000 per year or higher to go to the NCAA, a figure that may have been equal to or greater than if they attended a CIS school.

***Efforts to get to the NCAA.*** The strong belief that the NCAA was the best possible location for the participants to continue their athletic and academic life, was illustrated further through the sacrifices they made in order to achieve this goal. Beyond preparing for SAT exams and increasing their training regimen, a number of participants went above and beyond to ensure they would get exposed to possible NCAA recruiters to fulfill their goal of pursuing athletics in the States. This included dedicating significant periods of time to creating highlight videos, recruiting packages, sending e-mails to prospective schools as well as attending as many

showcase camps as possible. The financial commitment in many of these cases was as considerable as the personal commitment. F1 detailed his efforts:

We would do film, weights, practice... every day... in terms of recruiting we actually took that on ourselves, my dad and I ... kinda put onto ourselves to do phone calls, send emails to the top 40 schools, and then we sent out film to all those schools... It's not only you... gotta pay... \$200 to participate in these combines or camps but it's the travel, the hotel, the food to get to these camps which... are usually at least 3-4 hours away, sometimes more... it was a heavy financial burden.

Parents tended to play an important role in assisting their children with the work of getting to the NCAA. Further, the financial burden was exclusively taken on by the parents in order to pay for various registration and travel costs. In some cases where these athletes were not on full scholarship, parents covered the costs of tuition throughout their NCAA experience, thus making them integral in their child's ability to pursue their athletics and academics in the States. In some cases, high school or club coaches and other family members were also significant in both shaping the expectations of the athletes to go to the NCAA, and in helping them get there. F2 stated:

My mom believes that she paid for my scholarship. She'd fly me out to Chicago for... specific camps. She would... ship me out to Michigan or Ohio... everywhere and anywhere. I was going to Florida for track camps... that all costs a really shiny penny.

Additionally, four of the 12 Canadians interviewed moved to different high schools or prep schools to help them with their development and increase their chances of making it to the NCAA. These athletes were all involved in market-driven sports (basketball and football). The range of commitment was more varied amongst athletes involved in non-market driven sports

(not basketball and football), as one athlete in particular needed no extra effort and was recruited on the spot during a practice. Others were more selective in who they contacted, maintaining what they believed was a more realistic perspective on going to the NCAA, while some were just as committed as market-driven sport athletes. It was clear the commitment level that came with being an NCAA athlete extended to the pre-college years, as participants spoke of giving up other aspects of their lives from an athletic and social perspective in order to fulfill the necessary demands to make it to the NCAA.

**Evolution of practical consciousness.** Overall, about 10 of the 12 participants believed that the NCAA is still a good option for some athletes, and if given the chance to do it over again they would, but the level of enthusiasm varied throughout the responses. As these individuals progressed through their NCAA experience, a number of unique events shaped each athlete's illustration of playing collegiate sport in the U.S. Fulfillment in this exploratory analysis is a complex measurement, as the student-athletes' experiences left them satisfied or happy with some aspects of their time down south while disappointed in others.

**Injuries.** Five of the 12 interviewees had injury problems that were severe enough to significantly affect the level of fulfillment they had in their athletic experience at their respective universities. Two of these athletes ended up returning to Canada as a result of their injury, while the other three finished their experience in the NCAA and responded to their injury in unique ways.

Both athletes who returned to Canada believed their experience would have been vastly different and more positive had they not been injured, and would do it over again if they could. F1, a starting football player, dealt with a myriad of injuries throughout his post-secondary career, but his practical consciousness was only strengthened through these challenges. His

strong work ethic and strength in the face of adversity allowed him to continue playing and to respond well to injuries he faced, and it seemed as though this was just part of the NCAA journey for him. This experience was different from a fellow football athlete, F6, whose experience was tainted through his injury and negative relationships with the coaching staff. For him, the enjoyment of the game was lost and he maintained his athletic commitments in order to retain his scholarship so he could continue his academic pursuits.

*Notoriety.* The two other participants who went through serious injuries spoke of the notoriety of being an NCAA athlete and competing in what they considered, unquestionably, to be the most elite level of collegiate athletics. For one participant in particular, the status that comes with being labelled an NCAA athlete was how she seemed to resolve the many tribulations, including severe injuries, that she went through in her experience. "It's the status... it's... an accomplishment... now knowing how much work it takes to get there... all the years I've put in... It builds character." (F2).

Other participants alluded to their experiences helping them develop strength to address adversity when they were faced with hardships in their athletic life, and used this to justify the culture that came with being a collegiate athlete. R4 explained that:

I think... in a way... there's a struggle before every good thing that happens. When you look back... that's all temporary the pain and everything you go through... it's the impact [it had on] my life that was well worth everything that I had to go through.

It appears that the "badge of honour" that comes with being an NCAA athlete is earned through these different challenges, and thus the practical consciousness of these athletes did not seem to change regarding their consideration of the NCAA as the ideal way of participating in collegiate sport.



Many of the student-athletes interviewed also discussed the high volume of training that took place throughout their experience, as well as the significant commitment made to their sport. Their schedule was focused on their sport for the most part, and their academics had to accommodate their athletic commitments. There was not a lot of free time throughout their days, as athletes were either training, practicing or in classes up until the end of the day. This was fairly consistent throughout the interviews. Asked how she resolved her various athletic and academic demands, R2 said:

You don't sleep... I don't know how I did it... I remember... we had to be at practice at 4:30 in the morning... And then we were practicing... seven, eight hours a day. So there was no time for anything and I don't know how I [found] time, but I know... if I had any kind of social life before that it was completely shot.

This led to many of the former student-athletes having a newfound respect for NCAA athletes, who some of them believed were unfairly constructed through the media to the public. The reality of being an NCAA athlete, which was rarely seen from an outside observer, is quite different from what spectators and those outside are exposed to.

I don't think people respect... how hard it is for those student-athletes when you look at them on TV... there's all kinds of... conspiracies and allegations about what's going on with the NCAA at the higher levels and guys getting paid and everything... but... for what they go through and... the amount of stuff that they have to deal with... you gotta have some respect. (R6)

This provides another level of fulfillment for these athletes, as they grouped themselves in with those who go through the grind of the "NCAA athlete" experience. The notoriety of this was clear in many of the interviews, as those who had gone through multiple injuries and such

maintained that they were very proud to say they were an NCAA athlete and that they took a lot out of the experience.

**Hype.** When it came to some males participating in market-driven sports, there was dissonance between their practical consciousness coming into the NCAA experience and how they felt reflecting back on it, particularly surrounding the perceived "hype" that comes with basketball and football. R5 explained that while his school got support, it was not necessarily the same at other schools around the NCAA: "There's schools I got to where the gym was empty, there was... 100 people maybe, empty bleachers, there's no band... none of that." R4 reiterated that not only was the NCAA vastly different from the product you see on television, but the times when his team was showcased through media, he hardly noticed:

We were on TV a couple of times, and I saw some highlight tapes with TV clips in it... and my friend was on the SportsCentre Top Ten... and you don't even notice those things man, you don't even care... you're just so tired and focused on winning the next game, you're like whatever.

Conversely, R1 explained that his experience reproduced his practical consciousness surrounding the NCAA. Although he was a red-shirt in his first and only year, he felt he got a great taste of the "NCAA experience" that included the notoriety and luxuries that came with being a player on a market-driven, immensely popular team. Interestingly, he did state that after returning to the CIS, he enjoyed having a rest from the high volume of training, describing that "you know there's guys who are completely in love with the game of football and everyday they eat it up and go 100% but you know personally it was, it was nice to have a break".

**Athletes as Commodities.** In reflecting on their time in the NCAA, nearly all of the participants described a business-like atmosphere to various degrees. Males and females who

participated in market-driven sports were more likely to refer to the business aspect of the culture, although this was also evident in other non market-driven sports as well.

The NCAA... they have all these rules for student-athletes, but they are this organization that is... non-for-profit yet that makes millions of dollars on basketball and football... I didn't realize... how powerful they were. (F3)

Many described their athletic experience as feeling like a full-time job, as some athletes were committed to over 40 hours a week just in their given sport. A few student-athletes referred to feeling commoditized underneath the NCAA structure, directly through their coaches or recruiters as well. F5 illustrates this "employer-employee" relationship:

Initially I was surprised by the level of control that the coaches had over what you did... but I just accepted [it] very quickly because you stop to think... they purchased you... they invested in you, they gave you \$150,000 and all you have to do is play a sport... So, when you look at it that way, you... say, okay.

This student-athlete commoditization manifested itself in a number of different ways. F1 described that he always felt he was "earning" his scholarship with the significant amount of time and work he had to put into the athletic aspect of his experience. R5 felt he was under a microscope during training and practices, and that a mistake or poor effort on his part could lead to his scholarship being taken away and given to someone the coach felt was more capable. He explained that every day that idea was hanging over his head throughout the experience. R2, who struggled with injuries throughout her experience, explained how she felt like "baggage" because she was unable to participate fully in the athletic portion of her NCAA experience.

***Coaches' treatment.*** A number of the Canadian student-athletes interviewed detailed accounts of coaches who cared more about winning and scholarship money than for their

athletes. The pressure to perform for coaches was significant, so much so that at times it took precedence over the welfare of student-athletes. The control exhibited by the coaches over athletes came in the form of training, overseeing their academic progress and ensuring they maintained a GPA that allowed them to remain athletically eligible.

Coaches dealt with injuries in different ways. While some would leave student-athletes with the medical staff and put their attention on healthy athletes, others put pressure on the individuals to return as fast as possible. F1 details the decision made by the "NCAA", more specifically coaches, to stop supporting fellow teammates that had to medically retire due to long-term or serious injuries, which opened his eyes to the more business-end of the culture. F4 recollected a joke her coach made to her while she was going through a serious injury

I had... huge problems, I was in... walking casts... my head coach told me if I was a horse she would of shot me because I have two broken legs... her attitude was... well you're hurt... you'll come back but... right now she wasn't very interested [in me].

Other participants discussed being pressured to compete despite not being fully recovered from their injuries. This led to both physical and emotional ailments in some of the student-athletes interviewed. Following her experience, F2 stated that passion was often times lost in the eyes of her coaches:

They want money... the new coach that came in all he cared about was money and you win to get money... as soon as he had someone that was doing really well he's suddenly their best friend and put all his attention on them and forgot about everyone else... was rude to everybody else, if you're not doing well he would just... ignore you or try to kick you off the team... cause he just wanted to win... to get money. And that's just how it was with everything there.

Some coaches also checked frequently on student-athletes, showing up in front of their classes to ensure they were going as well as having their athletes' grades readily available. This constant surveillance of the athletes, while possibly seen as a good motivator for maintaining grades, demonstrates the power of coaches over student-athletes in this setting. R5 was told following his first year that if he was not academically eligible to play in the fall that he would lose his scholarship money until he became eligible again. This instance, which played a role in his decision to return to Canada, illustrates that coaches have a major impact on the academic opportunities of athletes as well. However, a number of participants excelled academically, and described that once their coaches realized they were maintaining well above the needed GPA to remain eligible, they were significantly less interested in their academic life.

The commoditization of student-athletes began well before they arrived at their NCAA institution, as the participants also mentioned the degrees to which recruiters and coaches would go in order to bring athletes to their institutions. This was done through travelling to meet athletes, bringing them down for an official recruitment visit to the campus which tended to be covered by the hosts, and usually ending with attempting to get the prospective athlete to sign a letter of intent. However, situations could change easily depending on if an athlete considered more talented is picked up by the team, which would lead to them losing interest in a student-athlete that they once recruited. This led to a precarious position for the student-athlete where they may end up having to look at other schools or risk continuing along their chosen path after losing the commitment of the coach.

Many of the former student-athletes interviewed acknowledged the pressure facing their coaches, which they used as an explanation for how the coaches treated student-athletes. So while student-athletes had some negative experiences as a result of the culture of the NCAA due

to coaching, those same coaches were under their own microscope. The pressure to win for coaches under this high-performance culture was what shaped their behaviour towards student-athletes, as described by many of the participants.

The coach said... something about not being able to put food on the table or so... if you had to put food on the table for your kids, and the only way you could do it was by doing your job, what would you do as a man. (F6)

***Fulfillment as an athlete.*** In some cases, the former NCAA Canadian student-athletes excelled in their athletic role, and this was significant in them reproducing the NCAA as an ideal post-secondary experience. Three of the 12 student-athletes (F1, F5 and F7) documented becoming important parts of their varsity teams, either right from the outset of their career or moving into their later years of competition. All three were eventually tasked with leadership roles on their teams and they garnered a full scholarship or a very high part scholarship; one moved on to professional play following their collegiate years. These participants were consistent in describing a mostly positive experience. This was despite F1 going through significant injuries while F5 gave many critical accounts of conflicts with her coach and the power that is held over student-athletes. F7 excelled in athletics, academics and extra-curricular activities as well, giving her a very well-rounded experience. Interestingly, F7's NCAA institution was quite small relative to the others in the study, having an undergraduate enrollment of under 2,000. In these cases, the practical consciousness of the student-athletes would not only be reproduced but strengthened regarding the NCAA.

## **Section II: Fulfillment in Other Identities**

**Academic fulfillment of student-athletes.** Academically speaking, there was a broad array of experiences throughout the interviews. The majority of the participants' reasons for

moving to the NCAA were either based on athletic aspirations or the fact that they could get a university education without having to pay for it or could pay less than normal for it through obtaining a scholarship. Many didn't know what to expect moving into the experience, or had not dedicated as much time shaping those expectations because their athletic identity was more prominent before and at the outset of the experience. Of the twelve participants, just one (R4) described plainly that he was not fulfilled in his academic experience, which was the main motivating factor for his return to Canada. While he had begun to have success academically in his second semester, and was on a full scholarship, the school did not offer programs that were of interest to him. Stating that he wanted to be able to use his education after he graduated, R4 came to the realization that he needed to go elsewhere to fulfill his academic pursuits.

For some participants who completed their degree in the NCAA, their athletic commitment also acted as a means for them to afford their education in the States. This meant in some respects these student-athletes were tied down to their athletics in order to gain more fulfillment by completing their education. A trend that was apparent in five of the seven graduating participants was that their athletic role seemed to weaken as they moved into their upper years of university and they focused more so on their academic commitments. For a couple of athletes, injuries as well as a general dissatisfaction with some happenings with their team caused them to invest less of their time or effort into their athletic side. For F3, her commitment level decreased gradually over the course of her NCAA athletic career. Although she still enjoyed competing and being with her teammates, her academic identity increased in her final years as she prepared to move on from university. For a number of the full-term participants, the main reason given for moving to the NCAA was to have their tuition covered through scholarships. Graduating debt-free was seen as one of their strongest fulfillments of expectations

regarding their academic life. F6 described that everything outside of athletics was a great experience, and he included his education in that respect. His experience in the classroom was shared by F1 and F7, both of whom went on to complete their Master's degree at the same NCAA institution after their undergraduate degree was finished. Other full-term participants described enjoying the course work they were taking, especially as they became more focused in the upper years of their undergrad. F2 was on a similar path until her athletic demands forced her to re-organize her academic path to fit in with her athletic schedule.

The five athletes who returned to Canada, three of whom garnered full scholarships, did not mirror this trend as they would not have been in the States long enough to move into their upper years. Only one of the five athletes spent more than two seasons in the NCAA, while three were there for just one year. While R4 stated that his lack of academic fulfillment drove his motivation to look elsewhere, it is difficult to discern whether or not the other Canadian returnees were fulfilled in their experience, because of the short time period as well as their efforts being mainly focused on athletics within that period.

Interestingly, some of the participants who excelled academically noted a negative lining on what would be observed as a seemingly positive venture. Once the coaches and administration found that these Canadian student-athletes were doing very well academically, their interest in the academic side decreased as they were only interested in being attentive to student-athletes who struggled academically.

We had meetings every year with the athletic director... and there's a huge portion talking about academics... because if you fall back in school then you can't play... So they have to pretend to care about your academics. (F5)

**Social fulfillment amongst student-athletes.** From a social perspective, all the participants



described forming close bonds with their teammates, which is not surprising given the fact that they spent the most time with them throughout the experience. There was generally not a lot of free time to be spent in socializing with athletic and academic commitments to fulfill each day. Participants also mentioned not having the energy as well as the time to devote to other interests outside of school and their sport because of their long days of training and studying. Some of those interviewed also mentioned that some of their teammates may not have been people they would have preferred being friends with. But it was more convenient given the proximity and sheer volume of time spent together to bond with them over other athletes or students.

Many participants also mentioned that having an immediate social group when they first arrived at their NCAA institution made the transition significantly smoother than if they had arrived and not known anyone right away. Having an immediate connection with a group of their teammates made the move from home as well as their general experience much more manageable and enjoyable.

I was so excited cause I feel... as an athlete when you go away to school... you have immediate friends... your team has to like you, they're gonna be there for you. So the nervous feeling of going in and feeling alone wasn't really there. (R2)

### **Section III: Challenges Shaping Agency**

Throughout their experiences, the participants were met with a variety of challenges that they responded to in unique ways. All of the Canadian student-athletes who made the decision to return to Canada before completing their eligibility in the NCAA continued their university career in their home country, and four of those athletes also maintained their athletic collegiate career in the CIS. However, the events that prompted their decision to return to Canada varied.

**Injuries.** Two of the athletes (R2 and R3) encountered their main dilemma at the outset of their experience, as one came into training camp recovering from an injury while the other became quite ill early in the year. R2 had a very challenging experience dealing with her injury, as she communicated that her athletic identity at the time was very high. She had Olympic aspirations and was excited about moving to the NCAA to continue her sport. However, her injury put a significant damper on this, and not being able to play made her feel like "immediate baggage". After re-injuring herself in her sophomore season, R2 made the difficult decision to leave an environment in which she struggled emotionally and physically, despite the strong support she received from her coaches. She discussed the difficulty of letting go of the NCAA aspirations that drove her throughout high school:

[Soft]ball was the motivating factor for school and it's... something that you feel you excel in... who you define yourself as and who people define you as, so coming home from school... I had to channel all that anger in figuring out what else was gonna motivate me.

After R3 recovered from illness in her first year, she suffered two injuries within the same season that significantly hampered her experience. After feeling she was being slightly rushed back by coaches following her second injury, R3 described feeling very uncomfortable and upset while playing large portions of games while injured. Conversely, because the game was important to her she still wanted to play, but was frustrated as she felt she was not playing to her capabilities. She also did not want to let down her coaches and teammates. After the season concluded, she responded to the situation by making the decision to move back to Canada.

It just wasn't fun. I was really upset... we'd win a game and I'd be... crying after... I wasn't having fun and I knew it wasn't going to change going into fourth year. I didn't want to be

miserable in my last year of university as a senior.

Fellow basketball athlete R4 went through an injury in his first and only year in the NCAA, and stated that he was playing through pain in practices and games after deciding along with the coaches to wait until the end of the season to get the necessary surgery. However, as previously mentioned, it was not injury or athletics that caused R4 to return to Canada, but his lack of interest in the academic offerings at his NCAA school.

The dilemma of injuries was also quite prevalent amongst full-term NCAA Canadian student-athletes, as four of the seven interviewees dealt with this issue throughout their post-secondary career. F1 went through a myriad of injuries throughout his tenure, and at one point was quite worried about his scholarship status, despite the fact that he was a starter from his freshman season forward. He also witnessed many of his good friends having to medically retire from the team. However, he was able to respond to this tribulation by forming a strong support system around him, including close friends, teammates, mentors and coaches, which helped him through his numerous recovery periods. F1 also red-shirted in his senior year to go through surgeries, and was able to play in his fifth year at the university.

F4 also suffered significant injuries that prevented her from playing consistently and thus cementing an everyday role on the team. The volume of training never allowed her to make a full recovery, and thus she was rarely fully healthy throughout her tenure.

It got worse and worse, and then I went on it in training camp and we played for however many hours for five days my legs were just... destroyed and I went back and... couldn't even walk. I was taking Advil... every four hours throughout the night... [my legs] were so bad.

With an increased focus on school and the pursuit of further education after graduation, F4 began playing another sport at the club level which she enjoyed much more than her varsity sport. She worked out an agreement with her NCAA coaches that she would still come out to practices, and they could still use her superb GPA to go towards the team average, but that she was not going to be on the actual playing team, thus allowing her to devote more time to studying for LSAT's and other interests. She was also able to continue maintaining social relationships with her teammates, which was a very fulfilling aspect of the NCAA experience for her. Similar to F4, F3 found her academic role and interest increase throughout her NCAA tenure, and noticed a shift in her role on her team to being that of an athlete who helped push her teammates in practice as well as in aiding the team GPA.

**Financial viability.** Another dilemma that was faced by two of the returning athletes was financially related, as the cost of staying in the NCAA was not as viable as it was to return to Canada. R1 was enjoying his experience in his first year, but was not on a scholarship with his school. Thus, it was not realistic for him to stay in the NCAA. Further, he stated that while he was mainly a practice player on his team in the U.S., he would have an opportunity to have a more impactful role on a CIS team, which also helped him with this decision.

For R5, who was on a full scholarship, finances was one of the challenges he faced following his first year. His coach communicated to him that if he didn't obtain enough credits to be athletically eligible by the fall of his sophomore year that he would pull his scholarship until he was eligible to play again. This meant paying upwards of \$20,000 for a semester. This combined with having one of the assistant coaches, specifically the one who recruited him leaving the institution, made R5 feel less comfortable about his status with the head coach and the team heading into the second year. Not wanting to take a chance on having to sit out and

hope that the coach was still interested in having him be a part of the team in the second half of the season, he decided to explore the option of moving back to Canada.

**Conflicts with coaches.** While these two athletes had situations that produced more amicable outcomes, especially with their coaches, this was not the case with others. F2 suffered through a number of injuries, but her experience was negatively enhanced due to the actions of her coaches. She was forced to compete in meets while injured, and severely aggravated her body to the point of having multiple parts of her knee torn as a direct result of her coaches' actions. However, she utilized the support system of her parents, who intervened with the coaching staff to ensure she would be properly covered for her surgeries and rehabilitation or they would take legal action against the athletic department. As this occurred in her second-to-last year, her coach, who previously had treated her poorly, asked her to take a medical hardship, which meant he would not have to pay for her scholarship and could use that money for another athlete. Recognizing the power she had in this moment, she refused to grant his request. Instead, she rehabbed leading up to her final year and ended up competing and breaking a conference record in her event. This also allowed her to finish her athletic experience on a positive note.

... I was pissed at the coach, I wanted to make sure he didn't get his money. And I wanted [to set a] school record... I ended up working really hard that year... I trained really hard...

was doing pretty well with my knee... and I ended up... [breaking the] school record.

F6 went through a similar experience with his coaching staff, who he felt played a huge part in his negative experience following a serious injury that occurred in his first NCAA game. After sitting out for the rest of the year and rehabbing, his relationship with his coaches deteriorated to the end of his collegiate career. He described that "you get to the point where you dislike your coaching staff... where it was like, empty promises. They just say things you wanna hear. And

it's frustrating". His response to this negative environment was to reconstruct his motivation for participating on the team. For him, his athletic commitment became a means to allow him to retain his scholarship and continue his academics, which was important to him and overall the reason why he decided to move to the NCAA. However, instead of continuing to overwork, he fulfilled all of the required demands of his athletic commitment with a more laid back attitude. This included refusing to play on the scout team during practices, which involved taking heavy hits from the starting line-up. He detailed his reasoning: "Why should I destroy my body for you guys, they want me to be a pin cushion on the scout team so that people can just run into me and crush me? No I'm not gonna do that."

In contrast, other participants stated that it was important for athletes to expect poor treatment from coaches and stick through the process in order to assist oneself in their athletic experience. This narrative further cements the notion that coaches are expected to assert their power using methods that may otherwise be questioned from an ethical standpoint. R4 exemplified this, stating:

at the time [I'm thinking] why the hell would somebody do this but when I look back... I think it's more the player's responsibility to deal with coaching then it is the coaches...

The coaches only real schedule is winning at the end of the day... especially down there cause if you don't do those things you get fired... So, I can't really blame him for anything he's done.

Other participants discussed that it is important not to be naive during the recruiting process, as coaches will market themselves and their program to prospective student-athletes in order to get them to commit, even if those comments end up being empty promises.

**Intensity and volume of training.** The other NCAA graduates went through their collegiate career free of serious injury, but still spoke of the intensity and level of training that they had to master in order to get through the experience. There are two points in particular, the first being that the difference in weight training was significant throughout nearly all of the interviews, especially when participants compared it to their previous experience in the weight room before moving to the NCAA. F5 spoke of the physical punishment and general weight room culture being militaristic at times throughout her experience:

It was just, physically grueling there were several moments where I'm like what did I get myself into... can I actually really handle this. [We] had one girl on the team who was Canadian and she left [because] she couldn't handle the training.

Additionally, "breaking in the freshman" was another part of the NCAA experience, as strength and conditioning coaches were given full reign to push first-year student-athletes to the brink both mentally and physically with early morning workouts with negative comments and insults. This was deemed as something that one must go through, similar to an initiation, in order to be accepted amongst the peer group. Thus, this is reproduced as a "normal" part of the experience.

Secondly, the immense volume of training led to some believing they were injured because of overtraining. Further, although others did not suffer injury, they were quick to point out the dominance of the athletic identity, in particular at the beginning of their experience. It was a shock to many of the participants, as their days began early, ended late, and consisted of multiple workouts as well as classes and study hall. This was considered to be part of the process, and the former student-athletes learned to adapt to this expectation moving forward into their later years, reproducing this expectation of an NCAA athlete.

Athletic life dominates your life while you're in an NCAA school. It dominates your

schedule, your emotions, your day planner. 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. weekdays, and if you have a game that weekend, your weekend is shot... usually even on that day off... you'd be doing work 4 or 5 hours so it was a probably a full-time... job at all times... then you were a student, and then you were a person. (F1)

## **Discussion**

### **Practical Consciousness**

I began this project with the assumption that prospective Canadian student-athletes would not question that the NCAA is the best route for athletic pursuits, and this shaped their action to move to the U.S. for the collegiate experience. Depending on the experience of the participants, their practical consciousness would be reinforced or challenged in their reflections. First, the majority of participants maintained that the NCAA is the ideal destination for athletic experiences. For some, this was due to the very high positive experience that they had. For others who went through difficult dilemmas throughout their experience, they wore those trials and tribulations as badges of honour. The notoriety of being an NCAA athlete was meaningful for the athletes, and thus this narrative reproduces the NCAA "gold-standard" reality. This was another part of the journey for them, and they did not necessarily reflect on whether or not there could have been another "gold-standard" alternative.

I don't know, it is what it is. And it's always going to be that way, take it or leave it. The NCAA and the whole system, it's working for them, people love it, and people really want to go and be a part of it. A lot of success stories... So I don't know if I'd really say there's something to change or what I would change. (F2).

Their accepting of the processes that take place in the "gold-standard" NCAA actually normalizes both that "gold-standard" perception as well as the methods that take place within it



as legitimate. One of the more critical interviewees even admitted that he would have felt disappointment in not going as well as a sense of failure because it was a goal that he set for himself in his high school years. Obtaining a "free" education, an integral aspect of the NCAA experience, was important to him, and he accomplished this despite many negative aspects. For the most part, practical consciousness amongst most of these athletes regarding the NCAA was either strengthened following their experience, or unchanged.

However, in their reflections some participants stated that they may have looked for alternative options more closely if given the opportunity to do so again. These alternatives included staying in Canada, and one participant also mentioned going to a smaller conference school in the NCAA. So while the NCAA remained ideal for taking the next step in high-performance sport, this may not have meant that it was as solid an option for some of the participants. This may be due to athletes' shift in their athletic goals, which was the key factor in shaping their decision and many efforts to move to the NCAA, rather than academic aspirations. Many came in expecting to play the highest level of competition. However, if they are not fulfilled in this goal, through not playing, injury, or unhappiness with coaches, being at the "highest level" of their sport was not as valued a resource. Thus, they are more inclined to obtain resources of being able to play more often, be a more valuable member of the team, or focusing more on academic goals. These may be attainable at other destinations, including the CIS. So while their practical consciousness regarding the NCAA remained intact, they did not think it would be ideal for every student-athlete.

### **Power Relations**

**"Do what the coach says".** Another example of practical consciousness that was illustrated in the interviews was the unequivocal authority of the coaches in their relationship to

athletes. As stated earlier, the hegemony that exists in the "do what the coach says" relationship manifested itself in a number of ways. This included: athletes following coaches orders' to train and compete despite knowing they were injured and not comfortable doing it; a student-athlete worried about making any mistakes for fear of his scholarship being revoked; student-athletes internalizing that it is their responsibility to deal with the behaviour of coaches toward them rather than to contest it. This makes it crucial for coaches to recognize their control over athletes, and thus not take advantage of the unequal power relationship. For example, although R2 ended up returning to Canada, she stated that she had the support of her coaches throughout her injury, and was told she would have her scholarship honoured throughout her time in the NCAA even if she could not ever play her sport. Unfortunately, this can be difficult for coaches, given the aforementioned cultural pressures that weigh on them as well. Thus, the importance of athletes being able to practice reflexivity around the processes that may be questionable is critical as they can then make decisions about how they choose to participate in their sport (Shogan, 2007).

**Employer-employee relationship (rules and resources).** The NCAA culture is shaped in such a way that from the student-athletes' perspective, its desired resources fall predominantly into the hands of their coach. These resources mainly include playing time and the allocation of scholarship money. However, these two resources are necessary in order for student-athletes to have a "fulfilled" experience, as they allow athletes the opportunity to access a free education, become a starting player on the team, maintain their place on that team over their career, and thus gain notoriety as a successful NCAA student-athlete. So, coaches garner the ability to assert their influence and athletes must conform in order to reap these benefits.

Coaches garner immediate power over athletes when they commit to a school and are given a scholarship. This was observed when R2 suffered a serious injury just after signing her

NCAA contract, and was hesitant to tell her coach for fear of having the scholarship taken away. This illustrates the immediate unequal power relationship that exists the moment some athletes commit themselves to a school. Additionally, F2 had to sit through meets where she was not even competing due to the rules set out by her coach. Further, she had her scholarship threatened after suffering an injury, another method through which coaches can wield their power to shape their athletes' behaviour. Similarly, R5 probably did not hesitate when his coach got the entire team out of bed at 4:00 a.m. to run hills. Generally speaking, R5 felt that he could not make mistakes in practice or do anything wrong in order to maintain his scholarship, stating that it was "hanging over his head" throughout his experience. This exemplifies what Foucault (as cited in Shogan, 2007, p. 150) termed "panopticism" or the "gaze of authority". Realizing that he can be seen by his coach, R5 learned to monitor his behaviour, shaping it according to his coach's expectations. In reality, he is unaware if he is actually being watched, but knew that it may be the case. This "panopticism" was felt in athletes' daily lives as well, as R2 described having to watch how you carried yourself at all times even when being out in the community or going out with friends, because being a scholarship athlete meant more emphasis on how you represented your school.

The pressure to train and compete applied directly by her coaches resulted in serious injuries to F2, who as the subordinate in this power relationship felt that she must consent to these orders. There is a responsibility on coaches' hands precisely because they are the authority which can place athletes into harmful situations. Conversely, this puts them in a position to prevent harm from coming to their athletes (Hekmat, 2002). In some experiences, it was also expected that athletes take summer courses so they could train in the summer together. While formally, training for your NCAA team is limited in the summer and coaches cannot be present,

informally it was understood amongst the players that they attend all training sessions and run their own scrimmages.

Some participants in the study normalized the coaches behaviour by stating that it is the player's responsibility to expect coaches to lie in the recruiting process as well as to use whatever tactics are necessary to put together successful performances. This puts the onus on the player, while further strengthening a behaviour on the part of coaches and scouts that, while dishonest, continues to be accepted. This naturalizes both the unequal power relationship that exists between coaches and athletes as well as practices that could be considered harmful to student-athletes, as described by Shogan (2007).

**Understanding the coach.** Many of the former student-athletes interviewed emphasized the "business-like" atmosphere of the NCAA. The market forces of success in NCAA athletes translating into the "must-win" culture acts significantly on universities, athletic departments, coaches and student-athletes alike. Student-athletes represent the proletariat who refine their skills in their given sport in order to achieve success. While the consequences of this have been laid out through the participants' stories, the coaches who shape the athletes' behaviour for their benefit are themselves shaped by the NCAA culture. The demand to win means more hours of work not just for student-athletes, but for coaches as well. Further, the average tenure for an NCAA head coach in the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), the top division of NCAA football, is 3.9 seasons, while the median is two seasons (Staples, 2010). And for some coaches in smaller conferences or lower divisions who are not making Division I money, winning is a part of maintaining their livelihood and supporting their families. Thus, it is not surprising that their priority remains mostly with utilizing their student-athletes as commodities in order to win games over ensuring the welfare of those same athletes. This explains why some NCAA formal

regulations that attempt to limit control of coaches over student-athletes, such as minimizing practice time to 20 hours per week (NCAA, 2013), do not hamper the coaches from bending or breaking regulations. The informal culture of winning in the NCAA supersedes that of a formal regulation. The result of this can be a less well-rounded athlete who garners a high skill-set in a very specific function, but has also been limited by the demands of his or her sport. This also means that while a single student-athlete does not have as much power, a team actually has tremendous influence on the success, and thus survival of an NCAA coach. This dual relationship was demonstrated through R5's account of the pressures his coach faced:

My coach was very young, he was 29, he had just gotten married throughout the summer, he's having his first kid, so everything was up and down for him... all the pressure was on him... I didn't realize how much we were affecting his life, like... we hold his future in our hands.

Coaches are in fact heavily dependent on athletes performing for them, which makes the power that they wield over student-athletes that much more important. For athletes, the fear of the many things coaches can do to assert their power, such as take away playing time, punish them with physical or verbal abuse, or rescind their scholarship, shapes their conformity. Further, the large amount of athletes vying for NCAA spots and scholarships means a significantly higher supply than demand, adding more pressure on current NCAA athletes to follow orders.

**Shaping student-athletes' academic lives.** Coaches could also be highly influential in the academic experience of these student-athletes. Their interest in maintaining their athletes' grades was driven by their concern for the athletes remaining eligible to compete. Depending on how successful student-athletes were academically, coaches would also exert pressure on them in this aspect of their life as well. This was done through the enforcement of study hall hours and

checking up on athletes where their classes were located. This contrasts with Dyck's (2010) research, which stated that athletic expectations left athletes unable dedicate themselves to academics. Some of the larger NCAA schools utilized resources in the form of academic centres and provision of tutors for student-athletes, who were expected to utilize this in order to remain in good academic standing. As noted in the Results section, many of the participants who did better than average felt they were dismissed by their coaches, who were more interested in helping struggling student-athletes succeed. While this is may be perceived as a win-win for both the coach and this particular cohort of student athletes, it would be worthwhile for coaches to also continue providing encouragement to athletes who excel academically.

### **Agency**

**Agency to challenge.** Shogan (2007) implored athletes to actively question the demands of normalized sporting practices, and once they understand their engagement in sport is shaped by these rules, to then make decisions about how they wish to participate. This was done by a couple of the participants who challenged their coaches' actions and decisions, which are usually seen as being absolute. The refusal to surrender scholarship money following an injury caused directly by a coach for F2 demonstrated agency to challenge those with more power. This was also exemplified through F6's reconstruction of his athletic experience. At first he felt frustrated by not being given playing time following his injury and subsequent recovery. However, reflecting on the main reason he was there, a "free" academic opportunity, he practiced autonomy in how he chose to participate in his athletic life, which meant refusing practices he disagreed with. This included not following the coaches orders to go on the practice squad, to be used as "pin-cushions" as he states for the starting lineup. Maintaining a healthy physical body and putting less energy overall into his athletic identity provided F6 with a healthier experience.

However, as previously mentioned, many of the athletes reproduced the normative coaching behaviours through putting the responsibility on the athlete to not be naive and to deal with the coaches' behaviour.

**Accommodation.** The pro-activeness of athletes can also lead to changes made by administrators or coaches that provide a compromise wherein the power relationship is maintained but the athlete gains something they want in the process. This occurred with F4, who was able to devote more time to other interests while still providing her coaches with what they wanted, in this case a strong GPA as well as her presence at practices.

**Returning to Canada.** The decision to return to Canada for five participants is also an active form of agency. Instead of remaining in a situation that was not living up to their expectations for a variety of reasons, they made a concerted decision to move back to Canada and continue their education here. For four of the five participants who continued their athletic careers in the CIS, this meant sitting out a season due to eligibility rules. However, given the circumstances that they found themselves in, they acted to better their situation. In many of the cases, Canadian student-athletes were pro-active in choosing how they wished to participate in their NCAA athletic experience. This was usually prompted through dilemmas or conflicts that occurred through their tenure that may have ruptured their expectations.

### **Student-Athlete Identity**

**Evolution of Identity.** The homogenizing effect of high-performance sport certainly pervades the NCAA, as many participants observed it as being a full-time job and the focus of their experience, especially in their early collegiate years. The student-athletes interviewed detailed typical days that usually began and ended with athletic commitments, while classes and study hall took place in between. This appears to fall in line with Hanlon's (2006) argument that

describes intercollegiate sport not as an extra-curricular activity but more of an occupation. Their study hall tended to be with other athletes, either their teammates or members of other varsity sports. With most weekends filled with competition, and rarely any days off in-season, it is easy to understand how their sport dominated their lives. R1 detailed how it was a running joke amongst teammates about how many hours they signed off on each week in line with NCAA rules versus the amount of time they actually put in each week at practices and training sessions, which reiterates the findings of Harrison et al. (2011).

This became harmful when dilemmas arose for many of the participants, as it shook for many of them what was their dominant identity coming into the NCAA experience. An injury can mark a significant turning point in their sporting role, and this was the case for a number of the interviewees. Some suffered mental anguish as they felt they could not play up to their capabilities and fulfill the dominant expectation of why they moved to the NCAA in the first place. This was consistent with previous literature documenting the identity crisis following an athlete's exit from sport (Falls and Wilson's, 2012; Dyck, 2010).

However, as Shogan (2007) stated, "the relentlessness of the sport discipline... can never... completely close the gap between life as an athlete and life outside sport" (p. 82). Many of the participants, and in particular nearly all of the full-term NCAA Canadians, saw other aspects of their identity become more focused as they moved into the upper years of their experience. The prominence in this shift varied amongst the participants, however even two of the NCAA graduates who had a very positive and fulfilling experience in their athletic lives also discussed their academic identities taking full shape in their upper collegiate years. Both ended up completing Master's degrees at that same NCAA institution. For other participants, their academic identities increased over their time in the NCAA, as a number became more career-



oriented or prepared for graduate school (Lally & Kerr, 2005). As this occurred, their athletic identity became less of a focus. This aligns with Miller and Kerr's (2002) account of identity amongst Canadian university athletes.

**Social Identity.** Most of the participants' social lives was dominated by their teammates and in some cases athletes of other varsity teams at their NCAA school. There are both benefits and detriments to this aspect of their experience. Many of the participants described feeling the transition was much easier in their first year, as they had an immediate social circle once they arrived on campus. This was favourable in relation to being a general student who does not know anyone coming into university. Falls and Wilson (2012) also found this to be the case in their research on Canadian female soccer players who moved to the NCAA. Additionally, garnering a support system that can include coaches, teammates, and academic advisors was also helpful for close to half of the participants in dealing with dilemmas or challenges that arose throughout their tenure.

However, remaining excluded from the general student body can have setbacks, as there is literature that argues there are negative perceptions of student-athletes harbored by non-athlete students (Simons et al., 2007; Harrison et al., 2011). The participants' in this study did not feel stigmatized in the academic environment, and only a couple mentioned fellow students having negative perceptions of them due to being given special treatment because they had a game or event. However, many of the interviewees mentioned a gap between themselves and the general student population, which is consistent with previous research (Dyck, 2010; Miller & Kerr, 2002). Interestingly, a few participants mentioned nicknames they would use for non-athlete students such as "noners", "Jersey girls", and "narps". These would certainly not bridge the gap between the two groups, which could lead to better social outcomes for student-athletes if it were

to occur (Watson & Kissinger, 2007). Evidence supports that student-athletes who spend more time interacting with non-athletic students can have beneficial effects. This includes improvements in personal self-concept as well as learning and communication skills (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009).

Participating in co-curricular activities as well as with professors and other students added to the experience of F7, who was very active outside of her athletic commitments, working on various committees and excelling academically. This gave her a very well-rounded experience, while conversely F2 described that her and her teammates would have enjoyed taking a semester off from their demanding athletic schedule to have a "normal" student life. Having more of a commitment to developing as a well-rounded student athlete may have been beneficial for F7. Furthermore, the demands placed on student-athletes by coaches and administrators can create social identity disclosure wherein they over-identify with their athletic role (Watson & Kissinger, 2007). This could have a detrimental effect on student-athletes' academic, social and personal development (Good, Brewer, Petitpas, Van Raalte, & Mahar, 1993).

**Canadian Identity.** This study represents a unique perspective on the NCAA from a collection of its former student-athletes that all reside in a foreign nation. However, the findings do not necessarily suggest that the experience of a Canadian student-athlete in the NCAA is vastly different from that of a U.S. student-athlete. In their comparison of how U.S. versus international NCAA student-athletes view the purpose of sport, Popp, Hums and Greenwell (2009) found that domestic athletes tend to emphasize competition as the main purpose for university sport. This contrasted with international student-athletes' views, who emphasized sport as one aspect of their university experience. However, Canadian student-athletes, who

represented the greatest number in the international sample ( $x = 28\%$ ), matched closely with the Americans in terms of prioritizing competition (Popp et al., 2009). This was consistent with the findings of this study, as many participants reiterated that playing at the highest level of competition was important to them. Given that Canada borders on the U.S., consumes much of its mass media including exposure to the NCAA, and has a similar sport structure that emphasizes high-performance and professional sport, these similarities are not surprising. A couple of participants discussed being ridiculed at times and stereotyped by their American teammates for being Canadian. R6 described that being a Canadian one must try and establish himself or herself in the NCAA a bit more than a domestic student-athlete in order to overcome being typecast as a stereotypical Canadian.

### **Sport Management Implications**

As previously stated, it is advantageous for student-athletes to be able to reflect on the processes of how they came to be a high-performance athlete, as once they are aware of this they can more actively make decisions about how they wish to participate in sport. For sport managers, this can be a difficult challenge with the pressures that go along with success in the collegiate sport culture. The inclusion and promotion of an ombudsperson into an athletic department specifically for providing student-athletes with assistance is a step in ensuring athletes are maintaining their rights to enjoy a balanced university experience. There does not seem to be literature in my research that discussed including an ombudsperson as part of an athletic department, and thus this could present a novel approach to assisting student-athletes. By including a full-time worker who looks out for the interests of student-athletes, athletic departments can possibly create a less uneven power relationship. This is especially crucial given that student-athletes do not currently have union representatives or a governing association that

protects their interests.

Although the existing culture of high-performance sport and the NCAA may make this an ineffective strategy, the increased interaction of student-athletes with non-athlete students can generate a more well-rounded individual who has a broader perspective on sport and how it fits with their collegiate experience. As an athlete spends more time outside of the homogenizing culture of sport, they can garner a more realistic picture of its processes. A first step is creating a culture within teams and athletic departments that supports interests outside of the playing fields and weight room. Second, the enforcement of rules and development of consequences that will deter coaches from overtraining their athletes will assist in this process, as will the creation of opportunities for student-athletes to interact with students on campus. However, in order to create these opportunities, NCAA member institutions need to themselves reflect on the culture they have created, and how it can hinder the development of well-rounded student-athletes.

**Implications for the CIS.** There are a number of implications this data revealed in the relationship of Canadian student-athletes, the NCAA and the CIS, particularly considering there have been significant changes made by the CIS in its policies on eligibility and scholarships. In their new "eligibility repatriation rule", the CIS now allows student-athletes who are competing in the NCAA to come back to Canada and play at a CIS institution immediately, whereas previously they had to sit out one year before returning to play (Canadian Interuniversity Sport, 2013, November 26). While the repercussions in terms of how the CIS plans to regulate coaches who will attempt to poach Canadians back across the border remains unknown, the data revealed from this study tends to show that this may be advantageous for student-athletes. Allowing Canadians who make a decision to go to the NCAA the opportunity to come back and compete right away gives our youth more autonomy to decide where they wish to compete. Many

participants in this particular study mentioned that being able to go to the NCAA was an experience that meant a lot to them. This was echoed by graduating athletes who competed for four seasons and by returning athletes who were there for a single season. While it remains to be seen whether this rule results in more or less Canadians going and staying in the NCAA, it allows more flexibility for the student-athlete experience.

Another recent major decision of the CIS was to approve a five-year pilot project specific to women's hockey that allows CIS institutions to offer scholarships that can now include room, board and books in addition to tuition and compulsory fees. This is a strategy that begins to emulate that of the NCAA, and with that it increases the power that athletic departments have over their student athletes. As discussed at length several times throughout this paper, this can lead to possible negative outcomes for student-athletes and moves the CIS into a more commercialized body with less of a focus on education.

While many of the student-athletes interviewed who had experiences in CIS discussed having a positive experience, the majority discussed the superiority of the NCAA when it comes to academic services. This is not surprising as the vast resources many NCAA universities have allowed them to create academic centres to assist their athletes in maintaining their grades. However, looking at creative strategies to offer academic assistance for student-athletes within their existing fiscal restraints may be beneficial for CIS institutions in attempting to promote themselves as more viable alternatives to the NCAA.

**Implications for student-athletes.** For future Canadian collegiate athletes there are a number of findings that are of value within this study. First, while I implore sport managers and decision makers within athletic departments of universities to provide opportunities for their athletes to explore their other interests and identities, there is no guarantee this will occur. Thus,

it is important to encourage young athletes to themselves practice a reflexive state, especially during uncomfortable situations or events throughout their sporting lives. While the participants of this study did not reveal a change in their practical consciousness, many of them were quite pro-active in dealing with challenges throughout their athletic experience. This ranged from challenging coaches to shifting to a more balanced set of identities in their lives, or re-locating to an environment that garnered more attractive resources. I encourage young athletes who have a passion for sport to also explore other interests and environments that will compliment their sporting experience while shaping them into a well-rounded individual. One of the more athletically successful participants also excelled on his academic side as well, reiterating that a focus in many interests is preferable. Developing a "hybrid" identity where an athlete participates in diverse interests can assist him or her in learning to view competitive sport from a critical perspective. This opens up the possibility for athletes beginning to participate in high-performance sport in ways that align with their beliefs while refusing practices that do not (Shogan, 2007). Further, it is also important for current student-athletes to realize that collectively they have a strong voice in shaping intercollegiate sport. Institutions such as the NCAA and CIS would not exist if it were not for the participation of student-athletes. Coaches are dependent on student-athletes to provide them with athletic success in order to maintain their livelihood, as are athletic directors and administrators. Thus, collectively recognizing and protesting against ethically questionable events that occur allows student-athletes to hold coaches, trainers and administrators responsible for their actions, creating an opportunity for foundational change in the treatment of student-athletes within North American high-performance sport culture.

**Implications for sport management academic programs.** Based on the findings of this

study, it is imperative that post-secondary sport management faculties include mandatory curriculum on social issues within physical activity and sport culture. Because sport management students are likely to pursue further education or careers post-graduation within the sport industry, they represent the future facilitators of post-secondary athletic programs. Thus, ingraining students with critical perspectives on the social construction of sport allows them to move into their future careers with knowledge on how to service sport participants in a more inclusive manner. Many sport management curriculum provides knowledge focused on strategy, marketing and capitalism within the business side of sport. However, it is integral that students also understand how the dominant ideologies of the North American sport culture, such as the NCAA "gold-standard", can have negative outcomes for certain groups of individuals, in this case student-athletes. Educating those who will influence the high-performance sport culture in the future can assist in protecting the humanity and rights of future student-athletes.

### **Delimitations**

I restricted the participant pool to two distinct groups. Group 1 was restricted to athletes who have completed their NCAA eligibility and graduated from an NCAA institution. Group 2 is restricted to athletes who did not complete NCAA eligibility nor did they graduate from the NCAA institution. Group 2 athletes included four participants who continued their athletic post-secondary pursuits in Canada. Additionally, to be eligible for participation in this study, former U.S. collegiate athletes completed their last year of NCAA competition less than five years before being interviewed.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations to aspects of this study. Because of the nature of the methodology, the results will not be generalizeable to multiple populations. A sample of 12 participants is not

enough to make grounded conclusions about experiences of Canadian NCAA athletes. However, I affirm that this research has the potential to set groundwork for future studies that can qualitatively and quantitatively analyze the experiences and outcomes for Canadian NCAA athletes.

Although these finding will not be generalizeable, there were some unique results amongst the sample. For example, there was a trend amongst the full-term NCAA athletes to become more involved in their academic identity as they reached the upper years of their experience. This differed from the returning athlete pool, many of whom left the NCAA before becoming interested in their academic side. There were no significant differences between male and female participants in terms of their academic motivation or success, as there were some interviewees who excelled or were met with challenges from both population groups. Finally, although revenue generating sport athletes were shaped by the media exposure of those sports early on, this was also mirrored by a couple their non-revenue generating sport peers. So although they were not watching their particular NCAA sport on television, some non-revenue generating sport participants assumed they would have a similar experience.

### **Theoretical Contribution**

This study made a novel contribution to the existing literature on the experiences of student-athletes in North America. While there has been past research on athletic and academic motivation as well as on the social lives of athletes, applying Giddens' (1984) duality of structure allowed my research to outline the NCAA social structure through the eyes of Canadian student-athletes. This enhances our understanding of the underlying power relationships that existed between these athletes and their coaches as well as the different methods that the participants used to work within the NCAA culture by illustrating their agency. Further, we now have a bit



more understanding of how this particular group of athletes first developed a practical consciousness that the NCAA was their ideal destination, and the diverse ways in which this practical consciousness was reinforced or strengthened across their experience. By deconstructing the NCAA sport structure using the experiences of these participants, we also identified the rules, and authority of those rules, that athletes conformed to in hopes of gaining the coveted resources that the "NCAA experience" garners. Further, utilizing Shogan's (2007) "hybrid athlete" concept allowed for gaining insight into the evolution of the different identities that made up our student-athletes, in this case their sport, academic and social roles. Participants' experiences also were consistent with Shogan's (2007) argument on the homogenizing effects of high-performance sport and the importance of diversity amongst sporting participants.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This study was exploratory in nature, but does set the groundwork for future research in the area of North American intercollegiate sport participants. The design of longitudinal, mixed method studies that follow the progression of a large pool of Canadian student-athletes from the time they begin their post-secondary experience to their exit from the NCAA would be worthwhile. This will allow for richer data collection upon which the results of this study can be tested for consistency. Additionally, although we have a rough estimate of how many Canadians cross the border to compete in the NCAA, there is no current research that has attempted to track the amount of Canadians who return from the NCAA and how many of those compete in the CIS. Thus, quantitative research in this area could be warranted. Further, while this study critiqued the culture of high-performance sport that exists in the NCAA, there is no evidence that a similar culture does not exist in Canadian post-secondary athletics. A comparative analysis that observes the culture of both the CIS and NCAA through its participants' experiences can shed

more light on the similarities and differences of athletes' experiences in both. This could be done by interviewing participants who began their career in the NCAA but returned to the CIS in their experience, or through comparing full-term NCAA Canadian athletes with their CIS Canadian athlete counterparts.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this exploratory study was to garner a better understanding of the southern migration of Canadian student-athletes to the U.S. through analyzing their experiences in the NCAA. This was done through a socio-cultural lens utilizing Giddens' duality of structure framework. First, the findings indicate that generally the practical consciousness of the participants regarding the NCAA either remained the same or was strengthened in their reflections on their experience. This practical consciousness was that the NCAA unquestionably is the "ideal" destination for post-secondary pursuits from an athletic perspective. Participants who were successful athletically reproduced the NCAA as a very positive experience. However, more unanticipated was the fact that athletes who met numerous challenges, which mainly included injuries, conflicts with coaches and the sometimes overwhelming athletic demands they faced, also reproduced this "gold-standard" narrative. Second, when faced with these dilemmas, the participants of the study responded in numerous ways. While some returned to Canada to continue their post-secondary experience, others challenged or negotiated with their coaches in order to garner a more well-rounded experience in their NCAA tenure. This included a significant shift to a more "hybrid" identity as they moved into their latter years of college. This assisted many of the participants in challenging the "status-quo" of the dominant demands of NCAA sport, as they began focusing more on their academic lives and devoting less energy to their athletic identity. Third, the results also illustrated a notable unequal power relationship that

exists between coaches and student-athletes as well as a "business-like" atmosphere where athletes felt commoditized. The "employer-employee" relationship between player and coach was consistent throughout the majority of participants' reflections. Encouraging prospective Canadian student-athletes to engage in a diverse array of interests can assist in allowing them to balance the homogenizing demands of the NCAA sport culture.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Interview Guide

#### (Full-term NCAA participants)

##### Introduction

Introduce self (hand out name card) and thank the interviewee for participating.

The purpose of the study is repeated.

Hand out consent to participate in research form and consent to audio taping form and ask them if they have any questions about the information.

##### Commence Audio Recording

##### Participant Classification Information [ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS]

[Mention date, time and place for the record]: *Today is* .....

Can you state your name for the record? .....

How old are you now? .....

Start date of NCAA experience: ..... (age at that time: .....)

End date of NCAA experience: ..... (age at that time: .....)

Type of sport and position: .....

NCAA division and school: .....

Type of scholarship (Full/Part): .....

Ethnicity (make note): .....

Gender (make note): .....

**Triggering Phase/Shaping of practical consciousness**

1. How did you first become interested in the NCAA, generally speaking?
  - What did you think of the NCAA in your high school years?
  - What made you become interested in pursuing an athletic and academic opportunity in the NCAA?
2. How important was the pursuit of an athletic scholarship to you?
3. What impact did the following individuals have on your decision to go to the NCAA: parents, teachers, coaches, and friends?
4. When did you decide that you were going to attempt to go to an NCAA institution? How old were you at the time? What further steps did you take to try and achieve this goal?
5. What commitments did you make in order to help you achieve this goal? (e.g., this could include creating highlight videos or travelling to all-star camps).
  - Personal?
  - Familial?
  - Financial?

**Recruitment Phase**

1. Describe how you were recruited into the NCAA school that you enrolled in.
  - Was there more than one school that approached you? How many?
  - What was the first contact you had with the NCAA school that you eventually enrolled in? Did they contact you initially?
  - How did you feel about the early relationship you had with the athletic department and school in your last year of high school?

2. Were you offered an athletic scholarship?
  - Was there a negotiating or bargaining process? Can you describe this process?
  - Were there any promises made to you as a part of the recruiting process? How did this affect your decision to enroll at the school?
  - Did you find any part(s) of the recruiting process surprising or unexpected?
3. Were you comfortable with your status coming into your freshman year?

### **Freshman Year**

1. Describe the first year of your athletic eligibility.
  - How was the transition from high school to university?
  - Describe the experience of moving away from home for an extended period of time. How did that affect you?
  - Focusing on the athletic aspect of your life, describe your freshman year.
  - Describe your role on the team in your freshman year? Were you a starter, substitute, red-shirted, etc?
  - Did you face any challenges or difficulties in your freshman year of athletics? Please describe them. How did you respond?
  - Were there practices, policies or decisions made in your NCAA athletic experience that you disagreed or weren't comfortable with? What was your reaction?
2. What was your experience academically in your first year of college?
  - How important was academics to you in your first year?
  - Describe the relationship between your athletic and academic commitments.
  - Did you remain in good academic standing?
  - How did you feel in the academic setting?

- How were you treated by non-athlete students and professors?
- 3. How did your athletic life affect other aspects of your life including social time as well as other interests? How did you resolve your athletic identity with other interests?
- 4. Reflecting on your freshman year, did it meet your expectations?
  - Were your expectations reproduced, challenged, or extended in any way?
  - In what ways did you feel fulfilled or unfulfilled as a student-athlete after one year of eligibility?

**Middle Year(s)**

1. Describe your athletic experience moving into your second year of eligibility.
  - Did your initial thoughts and expectations of the NCAA experience change after completing one year of eligibility?
  - What were your expectations heading into your second year?
  - Did you experience a change in your role on the team? How did you feel about your role on the team in your sophomore year?
  - Did you face any challenges or difficulties in your middle years of eligibility? Please describe them. How did you respond?
  - Were there practices, policies or decisions made in your athletic experience that you disagreed or weren't comfortable with? What was your reaction?
2. Describe your academic experience in your second year of eligibility.
  - Did you remain in good academic standing?
  - How did you feel in the academic setting?
  - How were you treated by non-athlete students and professors?
  - What impact did your athletic life have on your academic demands?

3. How did your athletic life affect other aspects of your life including social time as well as other interests? How did you resolve your athletic identity with other interests?

### **Senior Year**

1. Describe your athletic experience in your final year of NCAA eligibility.
  - How did you evolve as an athlete by the time you were participating in your fourth year?
  - What role did you have on the team?
  - Did you have more freedom and power as an athlete in your final year? What autonomy did you have as a senior that you may not have had in your earlier years of eligibility?
  - Did you witness or experience any conflicts or dilemmas in your senior year? How did you respond?
  - Were there practices, policies or decisions made in your athletic experience that you disagreed or weren't comfortable with? What was your reaction?
2. Describe your academic experience in your final year.
  - How important was academics to you in your final year?
  - Compare the importance of academics to athletics in your final year.
  - Was there a change in how you felt being in an academic setting? Please describe.
  - Was there a change in how non-athlete students and professors treated you? Please describe.
3. How did your athletic life affect other aspects of your life including social time as well as other interests? How did you resolve your athletic identity with other interests?

**Graduation/Reflection**

1. Did you feel prepared to move on to the next chapter of your life following graduation?
  - What were your plans after graduation? Were you able to accomplish them?
  - Did you continue on in your athletic life? In what capacity?
2. Looking back on your NCAA student-athlete experience, were your expectations fulfilled?
  - How has your perception of the NCAA evolved from when you first began your experience?
  - If given the choice again, would you follow the same path? Why or why not?
  - From an academic standpoint, were your expectations fulfilled?
  - What could have been done better to give you a more positive experience from an athletic and academic standpoint?
  - What could have been done to better improve other aspects of your collegiate experience outside athletics or academics?
3. If you were to give advice to an incoming freshman from Canada advice on how to succeed in the NCAA, what would it be?
  - Would you recommend the NCAA experience?
  - What suggestions would you give from an athletic standpoint?
  - What suggestions would you give from an academic standpoint?

**Appendix B****Interview Guide****(NCAA participants who returned to Canada)****Introduction**

Introduce self (hand out name card) and thank the interviewee for participating.

The purpose of the study is repeated.

Hand out consent to participate in research form and consent to audio taping form and ask them if they have any questions about the information.

**Commence Audio Recording****Participant Classification Information [ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS]**

[Mention date, time and place for the record]: *Today is* .....

Can you state your name for the record? .....

How old are you now? .....

Start date of NCAA experience: ..... (age at that time: .....)

End date of NCAA experience: ..... (age at that time: .....)

Type of sport and position: .....

NCAA division and school: .....

Type of scholarship (Full/Part): .....

Ethnicity (make note): .....

Gender (make note): .....



**Triggering Phase/Shaping of practical consciousness**

1. How did you first become interested in the NCAA, generally speaking?
  - What did you think of the NCAA in your high school years?
  - What made you become interested in pursuing an athletic and academic opportunity in the NCAA?
2. How important was the pursuit of an athletic scholarship to you?
3. What impact did the following individuals have on your decision to go to the NCAA: parents, teachers, coaches, and friends?
4. When did you decide that you were going to attempt to go to an NCAA institution? ?  
How old were you at the time? What further steps did you take to try and achieve this goal?
5. What commitments did you make in order to help you achieve this goal? (e.g., this could include creating highlight videos or travelling to all-star camps).
  - Personal?
  - Familial?
  - Financial?

**Recruitment Phase**

1. Describe how you were recruited into the NCAA school that you enrolled in.
  - Was there more than one school that approached you? How many?
  - What was the first contact you had with the NCAA school that you eventually enrolled in? Did they contact you initially?
  - How did you feel about the early relationship you had with the athletic department and school in your last year of high school?

2. Were you offered an athletic scholarship?
  - Was there a negotiating or bargaining process? Can you describe this process?
  - Were there any promises made to you as a part of the recruiting process? How did this affect your decision to enroll at the school?
  - Did you find any part(s) of the recruiting process surprising or unexpected?
3. Were you comfortable with your status coming into your freshman year?

### **Freshman Year**

1. Describe the first year of your athletic eligibility.
  - How was the transition from high school to university?
  - Describe the experience of moving away from home for an extended period of time. How did that affect you?
  - Focusing on the athletic aspect of your life, describe your freshman year.
  - Describe your role on the team in your freshman year? Were you a starter, substitute, red-shirted, etc?
  - Did you face any challenges or difficulties in your freshman year of athletics? Please describe them. How did you respond?
  - Were there practices, policies or decisions made in your NCAA athletic experience that you disagreed or weren't comfortable with? What was your reaction?
2. What was your experience academically in your first year of college?
  - How important was academics to you in your first year?
  - Describe the relationship between your athletic and academic commitments.
  - Did you remain in good academic standing?
  - How did you feel in the academic setting?

- How were you treated by non-athlete students and professors?
- 3. How did your athletic life affect other aspects of your life including social time as well as other interests? How did you resolve your athletic identity with other interests?
- 4. Reflecting on your freshman year, did it meet your expectations?
  - Were your expectations reproduced, challenged, or extended in any way?
  - In what ways did you feel fulfilled or unfulfilled as a student-athlete after one year of eligibility?

**Middle Year(s)**

1. Describe your athletic experience moving into your second year of eligibility.
  - Did your initial thoughts and expectations of the NCAA experience change after completing one year of eligibility?
  - What were your expectations heading into your second year?
  - Did you experience a change in your role on the team? How did you feel about your role on the team in your sophomore year?
  - Did you face any challenges or difficulties in your middle years of eligibility? Please describe them. How did you respond?
  - Were there practices, policies or decisions made in your athletic experience that you disagreed or weren't comfortable with? What was your reaction?
2. Describe your academic experience in your second year of eligibility.
  - Did you remain in good academic standing?
  - How did you feel in the academic setting?
  - How were you treated by non-athlete students and professors?
  - What impact did your athletic life have on your academic demands?

3. How did your athletic life affect other aspects of your life including social time as well as other interests? How did you resolve your athletic identity with other interests?

### **Break-Up Phase**

1. Describe what event(s) triggered you to begin thinking of leaving the NCAA without finishing your eligibility or degree requirements and return to Canada.
  - Was it sport related (injury, falling out with the team or your coach, lose your scholarship award)?
  - Was it related to academics (e.g., failing a course, did not like program, fall out of good academic standing)?
  - Any other issue (e.g., family related, financially, ...)?
2. Describe the relationship between you and your athletic department during this phase.
  - Did you maintain a positive relationship with your coaches, teammates and administrators during this phase?
  - Was there an attempt to resolve the issue for yourself in order to be able to stay enrolled at the institution?
3. What was your perspective of the NCAA experience following this phase?
  - How had your view of the "NCAA experience" evolved after going through this phase?
4. How fulfilled were you with your time spent as an NCAA student-athlete?
  - Describe your level of fulfillment with the NCAA as an athlete.
  - Describe your level of fulfillment with your experience as a student.

**Canada Phase**

1. When you returned to Canada, did you resume your athletic and academic career? If so, describe the process.
  - How did you go about finding a school that fit your academic and athletic needs?
  - How were you received by your new coaches and teammates?
  - What, if any, expectations were placed on you by coaches and teammates?
  - What expectations did you have of playing in Canada?
2. Describe the experience of playing in Canada.
  - How did being a former NCAA athlete affect your playing experience in Canada?
  - How were you treated by coaches and teammates? Do you believe this was a result of the fact you were a former NCAA athlete?
  - Were you surprised by any aspects of your experience in Canada?
  - Were you fulfilled in your athletic experience?
  - Were you fulfilled in your academic experience?
  - How did your athletic life affect other aspects of your life including your social time as well as other interests? How did you resolve your athletic identity with other interests?
3. Compare the experience of being a student-athlete in Canada versus the NCAA.
  - How did you feel about the level of play in Canada compared to the U.S?
  - In what ways was the Canadian experience better/worse than the NCAA experience?
  - In what ways was the NCAA experience better/worse than the Canadian experience?
  - Compare your university academic life in Canada with the U.S.

**Graduation/Reflection**

4. Did you feel prepared to move on to the next chapter of your life following graduation?
  - What were your plans after graduation? Were you able to accomplish them?
  - Did you continue on in your athletic life? In what capacity?
5. Looking back on your NCAA student-athlete experience, were your expectations fulfilled?
  - How has your perception of the NCAA evolved from when you first began your experience?
  - If given the choice again, would you follow the same path? Why or why not?
  - From an academic standpoint, were your expectations fulfilled?
  - What could have been done better to give you a more positive experience from an athletic and academic standpoint?
  - What could have been done to better improve other aspects of your collegiate experience outside athletics or academics?
6. If you were to give advice to an incoming freshman from Canada advice on how to succeed in the NCAA, what would it be?
  - Would you recommend the NCAA experience?
  - What suggestions would you give from an athletic standpoint?
  - What suggestions would you give from an academic standpoint?

**Appendix C****Results Table**

Table 1 Results laid out by section		
Section I Practical Consciousness	Section II Fulfillment in other identities	Section III Challenges shaping Agency
Shaping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NCAA as the "gold-standard"</li> <li>Scholarships</li> <li>Efforts to get to NCAA</li> </ul>	Academic Identity	Injuries
	Social Identity	Financial Viability
		Conflicts with Coaches
		Intensity/Volume of Training
Evolution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Injuries</li> <li>Notoriety</li> <li>Hype</li> <li>Athletes as Commodities</li> <li>Coaches' Treatment</li> <li>Fulfillment as an athlete</li> </ul>		

**Appendix D****Characteristics of Study Sample**

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Canadian NCAA Athlete	Age	Gender	Race	Age at End Date	Sport	Scholarship	NCAA Division
Returning Athlete 1 (R1)	19	Male	White	19	Football	None	I
Full-term Athlete 1 (F1)	26	Male	White	24	Football	Full	I
Returning Athlete 2 (R2)	23	Female	White	19	Softball	Part	I
Full-term Athlete 2 (F2)	25	Female	White	22	Track and Field	Full	I
Returning Athlete 3 (R3)	21	Female	White	20	Basketball	Full	I
Full-term Athlete 3 (F3)	23	Female	White	21	Track and Field	Part	I
Returning Athlete 4 (R4)	19	Male	White	18	Basketball	Full	I
Full-term Athlete 4 (F4)	24	Female	White	22	Field Hockey	Part	I
Returning Athlete 5 (R5)	20	Male	Brown	21	Basketball	Full	II
Full-term Athlete 5 (F5)	26	Female	White	22	Volleyball	Full	I
Full-term Athlete 6 (F6)	25	Male	Mixed	24	Football	Full	I-AA
Full-term Athlete 7 (F7)	27	Female	White	22	Softball	Part	II



## **Appendix E**

### **LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Title of Study: The experiences of Canadian athletes who participated in the NCAA

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Adam Ali, from the Faculty of Human Kinetics at the University of Windsor, under research supervisor Dr. Marijke Taks, and results will be contributed to a Master's Thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Adam Ali at XXX-XXX-XXXX or Dr. Marijke Taks at XXX-XXX-XXXX ext. XXXX

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the experiences of Canadian student-athletes who moved to the NCAA for their post-secondary pursuits. Specifically, my research will document how experiences of student-athletes evolved over time from an athletic and academic perspective.

#### **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in a 45 to 60 minute confidential interview regarding your experience as a Canadian student-athlete who participated in the NCAA.

#### **AUDIO RECORDING**

The interview will be audio taped. The name of each participant will not be revealed to anyone outside of the researcher and the taping will be kept confidential. Recordings will be transferred to a secure computer only accessible by the researcher, and the recordings will be destroyed immediately after they are transcribed.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

This research study focuses on the experiences of Canadian student-athletes who moved to the NCAA had in their experience. Thus the risk involved in this research is minimal. Participants will be asked to recall their past experiences as a collegiate student and athlete, which may lead to memory of negative or stressful situations, which could potentially make participants anxious or uncomfortable depending on the nature of the memory.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

This study provides an opportunity for its participants to reflect on their time in the NCAA. This allows participants to first express their expectations at the outset of this experience and second

articulate how fulfilled they felt throughout and after their experience. Clarifying their opinions and thoughts on this experience may provide a feeling that is psychologically rewarding.

In addition, participants can gain insight into how the NCAA experience re-shaped their perception of collegiate athletics in the U.S., providing them with a clearer illustration of their own development as an athlete and person.

Participants will also be able to feel positively that this recount of their experience is being used to help enhance the circumstances of student-athletes and gain a better understanding of how to service student-athletes by more holistic and inclusive means.

This research gains insight into the experiences of student-athletes from an athletic and academic perspective, and thus has the potential to benefit both U.S. and Canadian collegiate athletic departments by providing them with a deeper knowledge of the lives of their athletes.

#### COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

Subject matter of the interviews, participant's information, and responses will be kept confidential. In all written reports, individuals will be referred to generally and provided with a pseudonym. All files pertaining to participant information and transcripts will be kept in a secure location for a period of five years after which it will be destroyed. The audiotape recording of the interview will only be accessible to Adam Ali and his academic advisor, Dr. Marijke Taks.

#### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Any participant, who wishes to withdrawal from the study, we will ask to continue to use your data, which you will be able to confirm or deny at that time. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

#### FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

A summary of the research findings will be provided to research participants.

Web address: <http://www.uwindsor.ca/kinesiology/>

Date when results are available: April 30, 2014

#### SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

#### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXXX, ext. XXXX; e-mail: XXXXXX@uwindsor.ca

#### SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

---

Signature of Investigator

---

Date

**Appendix F****CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Title of Study: The experiences of Canadian athletes who participated in the NCAA

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Adam Ali, from the Faculty of Human Kinetics at the University of Windsor, under research supervisor Dr. Marijke Taks, and results will be contributed to a Master's Thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Adam Ali at XXX-XXX-XXXX or Dr. Marijke Taks at XXX-XXX-XXXX ext. XXXX

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the experiences of Canadian student-athletes who moved to the NCAA for their post-secondary pursuits. Specifically, my research will document how experiences of student-athletes evolved over time from an athletic and academic perspective.

**PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in a 45 to 60 minute confidential interview regarding your experience as a Canadian student-athlete who participated in the NCAA.

**AUDIO RECORDING**

The interview will be audio taped. The name of each participant will not be revealed to anyone outside of the researcher and the taping will be kept confidential. Recordings will be transferred to a secure computer only accessible by the researcher, and the recordings will be destroyed immediately after they are transcribed.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

This research study focuses on the experiences of Canadian student-athletes who moved to the NCAA had in their experience. Thus the risk involved in this research is minimal. Participants will be asked to recall their past experiences as a collegiate student and athlete, which may lead to memory of negative or stressful situations, which could potentially make participants anxious or uncomfortable depending on the nature of the memory.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

This study provides an opportunity for its participants to reflect on their time in the NCAA. This allows participants to first express their expectations at the outset of this experience and second

articulate how fulfilled they felt throughout and after their experience. Clarifying their opinions and thoughts on this experience may provide a feeling that is psychologically rewarding.

In addition, participants can gain insight into how the NCAA experience re-shaped their perception of collegiate athletics in the U.S., providing them with a clearer illustration of their own development as an athlete and person.

Participants will also be able to feel positively that this recount of their experience is being used to help enhance the circumstances of student-athletes and gain a better understanding of how to service student-athletes by more holistic and inclusive means.

This research gains insight into the experiences of student-athletes from an athletic and academic perspective, and thus has the potential to benefit both U.S. and Canadian collegiate athletic departments by providing them with a deeper knowledge of the lives of their athletes.

#### COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

Subject matter of the interviews, participant's information, and responses will be kept confidential. In all written reports, individuals will be referred to generally and provided with a pseudonym. All files pertaining to participant information and transcripts will be kept in a secure location for a period of five years after which it will be destroyed. The audiotape recording of the interview will only be accessible to Adam Ali and his academic advisor, Dr. Marijke Taks.

#### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Any participant, who wishes to withdrawal from the study, we will ask to continue to use your data, which you will be able to confirm or deny at that time. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

#### FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

A summary of the research findings will be provided to research participants.

Web address: <http://www.uwindsor.ca/kinesiology/>

Date when results are available: April 30, 2014

#### SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

#### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXXX, ext. XXXX; e-mail: xxxxx@uwindsor.ca

#### SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study *The experiences of Canadian athletes who participated in the NCAA* as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

#### SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix G****Scripts for Recruitment****E-mail/Social Media Script for Participants**

Dear (name of potential participant),

I am conducting a study documenting the experiences of former Canadian student-athletes who participated in the NCAA. I am conducting the study for my Master's thesis under the supervision of Dr. Marijke Taks.

This e-mail is being sent to ask for your participation in this study.

I was hoping you would be willing to volunteer to participate in an in-person interview that will take about 45 minutes to an hour of your time.

This study has received clearance from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Windsor, and I have attached a letter of information outlining the study's purpose and goals as well as confirming research ethics approval.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, would you be so kind to provide me with a telephone number so that I may contact you in the next couple of days to arrange an interview date and time. If you wish, you may also provide me with desirable dates and times that are convenient for your schedule as well in your response e-mail.

Should you wish not to participate in this study, feel free to send an e-mail and we will withdraw your name from the study. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me or my advisor at the phone number or e-mail below.

Thank you very much in advance for taking this invitation into consideration.

Sincerely,

Adam Ali

Adam Ali

Principal Investigator

E-mail: XXXXXXXX@uwindsor.ca

Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Dr. Marijke Taks

Advisor, Professor of Sport Management

Email: XXXX@uwindsor.ca

Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX ext. XXXX

**E-mail/Social Media Script: Personal Connections (to recruit participants)**

Dear (name of connection),

I am conducting a study documenting the experiences of former Canadian student-athletes who participated in the NCAA. I am conducting the study for my Master's thesis under the supervision of Dr. Marijke Taks.

This e-mail is being sent to request your assistance in identifying possible recruits for this study. Participants for this study are former Canadian athletes who played in the NCAA. In addition, they must have played in the NCAA within the last five years. They would be asked to volunteer about 45 minutes to an hour of their time for an in-person interview.

This study has received clearance from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Windsor, and I have attached a letter of information outlining the study's purpose and goals as well as confirming research ethics approval.

If you can identify possible participants for this study, you can contact them on my behalf with a request to contact me. If they agree, then you may pass along my contact information and the letter of information to the potential participants, who can contact me if they are interested.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me or my advisor at the phone number or e-mail below.

Thank you very much in advance for taking this request into consideration.

Sincerely,  
Adam Ali

Adam Ali  
Principal Investigator  
E-mail: XXXXXXXX@uwindsor.ca  
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Dr. Marijke Taks  
Advisor, Professor of Sport Management



**Vita Auctoris**

<b>Name</b>	Adam Ehsan Ali
<b>Place of Birth</b>	Toronto, Ontario, Canada
<b>Year of Birth</b>	1986
<b>Education</b>	University of Toronto, Ontario Canada 2004-2010 Bachelor, Physical Education and Health University of Windsor, Ontario Canada 2012-2014 Master, Human Kinetics (Sport Management)
<b>Presentations</b>	Kick, punch, grapple: Exploring women's motivations for mixed martial arts participation. Presented at the 28th Annual Conference of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), Austin, Texas, May 28-31, 2013. Impact of female athlete portrayals in sport marketing. Presented at 12th Annual Macintosh Sociology of Sport Day Conference, Queen's University, January 25, 2013. The fulfillment of Canadian student-athletes in the NCAA. To be presented at the 29th Annual Conference of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, May 27-31, 2014.